THE EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR. W. A.
CRISWELL, PASTOR OF THE FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH, DALLAS, TEXAS, 1944-1987

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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August, 1988
Rohm, Robert A., *The Educational Contributions of Dr. W. A. Criswell, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, 1944-1987.*

Doctor of Philosophy (Higher Education Administration), August, 1988, 188 pp., 3 tables, bibliography, 47 titles.

Dr. W. A. Criswell is the well known pastor of the twenty-seven thousand member historic First Baptist Church in downtown Dallas, Texas. He has held the position for the past forty-three years. Until now no one has attempted an in-depth study of Criswell's educational contributions to the First Baptist Church (which have also been adopted into the Southern Baptist denomination, America's largest Protestant religious organization).

Although Criswell has been the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas for many years, this was by no means his introduction to the pastorate. In 1928 he was ordained as a seventeen year old minister of the gospel in Amarillo, Texas. He has been a pastor for over sixty years.

Criswell has made a lasting impact on the church staff, school staff (Criswell College and First Baptist Academy), students in those schools, the Southern Baptist denomination and also the city of Dallas. He has been one of the key figures in evangelical national movements. Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Senators, and Governors are no strangers to a Sunday morning service held in the large sanctuary in downtown Dallas.

Much of the research for this project originated from the Oral
Memoirs of W. A. Criswell, a program for oral history done by two professors (Charlton and Spain) from Baylor University.

The study begins with a historical review of the setting of the First Baptist Church in 1944 when Criswell came to be pastor. Next there is a review of Criswell's early life that reveals influences which molded his educational philosophies. The body of knowledge is then presented which points out significant events, contributions, institutions and associations provided by Criswell. Finally, seventeen conclusions are drawn from the data presented.

The study provides helpful information to pastors, church administrators, seminary students, theological professors and other individuals involved in education and administration.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to thank my wife Donna for being my faithful friend and co-worker throughout graduate school and dissertation studies. She has typed proofread, retyped, added, deleted and made helpful suggestions throughout this project. Her price is "far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10).

My four daughters, Rachael, Esther, Elizabeth and Susanna, have come to dislike the word "dissertation," but still love their daddy. I am grateful for such a sweet group of girls. Each one is precious to me.

I want to express my gratitude to my mother who went through some difficult days while I was in graduate school. The loss of her spouse, my father, along with physical problems, including surgery, did not stop her from always encouraging me to continue academic pursuits over the years.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to my co-workers at First Baptist Church, for encouragement and giving me helpful tips along the way. Dr. Grace Wilson, librarian assistant, has a great memory for details.

I want to thank Mrs. Toxie White for long, tedious hours of tape transcription. She listened to many of W. A. Criswell's selected sermons and copied them word-for-word for review. What a labor of love! Also, special thanks to Regan Smith for similar work in tape transcription.

Finally, I want to thank my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Dottie Bailey, for being the best English teacher in the world. She taught me to love literature, grammar, and writing even when I was not interested. I can still hear her now, "Robert Rohm, you are going to learn this if it kills you and me both!" It almost did. God bless good school teachers.
PREFACE

The study focuses primarily on Dr. Criswell and secondarily on the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas. Criswell has been the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, since October, 1944. The church has undergone many changes during his tenure. Without him, however, these changes would have never occurred. The study is organized around significant events, institutions, associations and contributions rather than any arbitrary chronology.

In 1944 the First Baptist Church of Dallas had been catapulted into national prominence by its pastor Dr. George W. Truett. W. A. Criswell was virtually unknown. Although he had served in several pastorates, they were all in less well-known churches. He had held no special position of prominence. Today, however, Criswell is more famous than the church that once called him as pastor. What brought about this transformation? Those events and more are discussed in this dissertation.

Finally it should be pointed out that this writer has been in a unique position to approach the topic. As a staff member of First Baptist Church, Dallas, and assistant to Criswell, this researcher has had the opportunity to observe first hand many of the results of Criswell's educational philosophies. One can read about Criswell and his accomplishments by the
hour yet miss the influence, power, and majesty of the man. He is a scholar, par excellence, yet despite his great learning, he uses childlike simplicity when dealing with people. He is a fiery prophet, bold as a lion, yet weeps compassionately for the souls of men. He is a denominational leader, yet owes his soul to no man or denomination. These characteristics and others can be studied in books but they are better discerned in person on a daily basis. Observing Criswell personally also afforded the opportunity not to be overly biased. Even great men have feet of clay and stumble along life's path. Therefore, an honest and accurate appraisal has had a better chance to be produced.

To accurately state Criswell's educational philosophy and discuss his contribution to the educational programming of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, necessitates some historical review. First, there is a review of the setting of the First Baptist Church in 1944 when Criswell came to be the pastor. This is necessary to understand the climate of the church at the time and the seemingly impossible task Criswell accepted. There is then a review of Criswell's early life which reveals some of the background influences that have molded his educational philosophy. Accurate history can only be repeated so many times before it becomes mundane. Dates, places and events do not change, but their significance does. It is hoped that the historical information makes the body of knowledge which is presented more interesting. Next there is the body of knowledge upon which the study
and research is directed, namely, the significant events, contributions, institutions, and associations Criswell has provided or implemented.

Finally, there are conclusions drawn about the man and the lasting effects of his influence. It is hoped that the reader will also find the appendices that follow the final chapter helpful.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study explored the educational contributions of Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas. It focused on Criswell's philosophy of ministry with special attention given to his educational contributions.

Dr. W. A. Criswell is the well known pastor of the historic First Baptist Church in downtown Dallas, Texas. He has held the position for the past forty-three years. Until now no one has attempted an in-depth study of Dr. Criswell's educational contributions to the First Baptist Church (as well as the entire Southern Baptist Denomination, America's largest Protestant religious body).

Statement of the Problem

There have been at least three dissertations devoted to aspects of Criswell's ministry: "The Expository Preaching of W. A. Criswell in His Sermons on Revelation" by Harold T. Bryson (unpublished doctoral dissertation; New Orleans: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967); "The Rhetoric and Leadership of W. A. Criswell as President of the Southern Baptist Convention: A Description Analysis Through Perspective and Public Address" by J. E. Towns (unpublished doctoral dissertation;
Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1970); and "W. A. Criswell's Choice and Use of Illustrations" by C.M. Roberts, (Unpublished master's thesis; Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976). None of these works, however, dealt with Criswell's educational contributions. This dissertation, providing organized information in a systematic manner regarding an educational leader such as W. A. Criswell, makes a contribution to research in religious education (Bailey, 1972, p. 325).

Although Dr. Criswell has been the senior pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas for many years, this was by no means his introduction to the pastorate. In 1928, he was ordained as a 17-year-old minister of the gospel in Amarillo at the San Jacinto Baptist Church. That same year he pastored his first church at Devil's Bend in Marlow, Texas. Later that year he began his second pastorate at Pecan Grove Baptist in Pulltight, Texas. In 1929 his third pastorate commenced in Mound, Texas.

After graduation from Baylor University he matriculated in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. While in seminary he continued to pastor churches. After seminary he pastored in Chickasha and Muskogee, Oklahoma. From Muskogee he came to Dallas. He has been a pastor for over 60 years. Until now no one has attempted an in-depth analysis of his educational philosophies.

The only biography written on Criswell's life was published in 1973. Billy Keith's work was entitled W. A. Criswell: The Authorized Biography
Reviewing Keith's work, Paige Patterson, President of Criswell College made the following comments and observations concerning the need for further inquiry into Criswell's contributions:

Essential dates and places are contained in this volume, but the need for a thorough biography becomes apparent in the reading of this elementary, plodding effort. The First Baptist years are discussed more adequately in Leon McBeth's centennial history, *First Baptist Church of Dallas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968) and in R. W. DuCasse's, "A History of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas" (unpublished Th. M. thesis; Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1964). The nearest approximation to an autobiography is a transcribed oral history completed under the auspices of Baylor University and the guidance of Thomas A. Charlton and Rufus B. Spain in 1973. The large volume is entitled *Oral Memoirs of W. A. Criswell* (Waco: Baylor University, 1973). Fondness of history, augmented by excellence of memory, make this oral history one of the most reliable sources on the life of Criswell. (1986, p. 238)

Significance of Study

There is no question that Dr. Criswell has made an impact on the 27,000 member congregation of the First Baptist Church of Dallas. He has also made a lasting impact on the church staff, school staff (Criswell College and First Baptist Academy), students in those schools, the Southern Baptist denomination (both moderate and conservative factors) and also the city of Dallas itself. There is no doubt he has been one of the key figures in the Fundamental and Evangelical national movements. Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Senators and Governors are no strangers to a Sunday morning service in the large sanctuary in downtown Dallas.
In the Education Commission of the States' report entitled, "Transforming the State Role in Undergraduate Education: Time for a Different View," it was noted, "The more prestigious institutions inevitably provide role models and set standards for all institutions" (Kern, 1986, p.13). This same philosophy can be true of individuals as well. That is, prestigious individuals inevitably provide role models and set standards for those under their leadership. This is pointedly true of Criswell within the framework of the First Baptist Church of Dallas as well as throughout the entire Southern Baptist Denomination.

Dr. Criswell has had an extensive ministry in preaching campaigns. He has been around the world on at least three occasions on preaching tours. He has preached to kings, headhunters and little children.

Criswell earned his Doctorate of Philosophy from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He has been awarded many honorary doctorates as well. He has been listed in several of the Who's Who publications. He has been to Washington, D. C. for conferences of religious leaders as the guest of the President of the United States. The results of his influence upon the First Baptist Church, Dallas is revealed in detail in this study.

This research also provides useful information to present and future pastors. It will prove helpful to church administrators, seminary students, theological professors and individuals studying or presently involved in
education and administration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the educational philosophy and contributions Dr. Criswell implemented in the First Baptist Church, Dallas, from 1944 through 1987.

Questions for the Study

To achieve the purposes of this historical study, the following questions were formulated:

1. What was the leadership style of Dr. W. A. Criswell when he became pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas; has it changed over 43 years of his pastorate; and who or what influences have affected his leadership style?

2. What was the educational philosophy of Dr. W. A. Criswell and how has it effected the educational programming of the First Baptist Church over 43 years?

3. What organizational changes have been made at First Baptist Church during the pastorate of Dr. W. A. Criswell?

4. What major educational contributions and accomplishments have been made by Dr. Criswell to the First Baptist Church during his pastorate?

5. What impact has Dr. Criswell's administration had on the staff of the First Baptist Church and its related schools?

Background of the Study

In 1944 George W. Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, died
after suffering an extended illness. It was inconceivable to most people that
anyone could follow George W. Truett. He had not only been a preacher to
Presidents, but he was also a world renowned Baptist leader. Dr. Duke
McCall was the individual most people predicted would take Truett's place.
He was a southern aristocrat who later became the president of Southern
Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky. Few thought W. A. Criswell
from Muskogee, Oklahoma would be chosen. Most had never heard of him
at the time.

In September of 1944, the First Baptist Church called him as pastor
where he has continued until the present time. Commenting on the
difference between Truett and himself, Criswell often quotes one of the
statements overheard regarding the two men: "We have traded a gentle
sunset for an atomic bomb!"

In studying Criswell's philosophy of ministry and educational
contributions several points immediately become apparent. Truett had
basically been a "one man institution." He did the work of ten men.
Criswell, on the other hand, hired ten men to do the work so he could build
the church.

The heart of administration involves decision making. It involves
making the right decision, all things considered. Hesburgh (1979) felt that
in the long run, people respect a leader for following his conscience, for
doing what he thinks is right, even though they do not agree with him.
Hesburgh quotes Churchill as saying:

The only guide to a man is his conscience. The only shield to his memory is the rectitude and sincerity of his actions. It is very imprudent to walk through life without this shield, because we are so often mocked by failure of our hopes; but with this shield (of conscience) whatever our destiny may be, we always march in the ranks of honor. (p.5)

Hesburgh notes that what this attitude often calls for in a leader is personal courage, often lonely courage, because everyone else below him has passed the buck. If a person does not have the courage to stand alone, quite often, sometimes daily during times of crisis, then the leader can be in agony. Without courage, it is always a failure. The uncertain always walk in a crowd. The leader most often finds himself marching single file at the head of a thin column.

Criswell had stepped into a difficult situation. He was only 35 years old when he accepted the job at First Baptist Church as the new pastor. He wasted no time in going to work.

Hesburgh (1979, p. 9) says a leader must not expect a lot of praise, must not do everything by himself, must not think he is dispensable, and must never pass the buck. Leaders who are generally unsuccessful most often fail from lack of humanity. They lose the loyalty of those with whom they live and work. All our dealing are with people, all kinds of people. In a word, people deserve to be treated with humane sensitivity. That is how a leader can best accomplish his task.
Over the years the First Baptist Church had gradually become a rather staid, downtown church, ministering primarily to mature adults. Their program, as well as their buildings, was structured primarily for adults. Most of the deacons were past 60 years of age. The church staff, faithful as they were, was by no means numerous enough to carry a full, family-centered church program. Most of the staff work rested in the hands of Bob Coleman and T. A. Johnson, both outstanding and eminently loyal men, but both of advanced age.

The new pastor wanted to rebuild the image and ministry of the historic church. He did not want to neglect the older members, but he wanted to create a family-centered church program, to appeal to children, young people, and young families. The elderly deacons listened respectfully as the zealous young pastor outlined his dreams, and then explained patiently to him why it was impossible.

Criswell was not convinced, and he was nowhere near giving up. Again and again from the pulpit, in private visits with influential members, and in deacons’ meetings, he presented his dream of a complete, well-rounded, family-centered church program in downtown Dallas. The idea met considerable opposition. Criswell had vision and wanted the church to grow.

Less effective leaders tend to be much taken with the status of their position and preoccupied with authority and privilege. They regard
themselves as inseparable from the status of the office, thus they tend to react with threats and often counter-aggressive behavior when under attack. They regard critics as opponents and "troublemakers" and commonly demean their motives and objectives. Criswell did not want to hurt anyone, but he was a leader in will, ability and vision. As far as he was concerned it was simply time to move ahead. It was time to lead. "Leadership is hence a process in which individual will, ability, and vision confront unpopular but necessary decisions" (Walker, 1984, p. 2).

Summary

The position of pastor in any church has a great deal that can be studied. The office has many facets including the pastor himself, his philosophy of ministry, his staff, the educational purposes of the church, the culture and times in which he works, and the changes which he makes within the institution. In studying the pastoral ministry of Dr. W. A. Criswell, much has been analyzed, and now a comprehensive and detailed study produced.

Dr. Criswell is a significant person in the field of higher education. He not only earned a Doctorate degree from the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, but has also been awarded honorary doctorates from Baylor University, Western Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, California Baptist College, California Graduate School of Theology, and Hannibal-LaGrange College. He has founded two schools, Criswell College and First Baptist Academy. He has been the president of the Southern
Baptist Convention, America's largest denomination. He has authored over fifty books, led many conferences and symposiums, written many magazine articles and reference works, and has been a regular contributor to Baptist publications for many, many years.

Because of his life of service to education, Dr. Criswell and his pastoral career made a worthy topic for research. The time seems appropriate since he is almost eighty years old and most likely in the closing era of his pastorate of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas.

Methodology

Gottschalk (1967, p. 8) states that by its comprehensive definition, the word history means "the past of mankind." The past is beyond recall in its entirety, making the study of history the reconstruction of that part of the past which it is possible to discover. The facts of history, except for rare survivals from the past are facts of meaning rather than facts of objective actuality. It follows then, that the history of historians include two things: (a) a process of examining records and survivals, and (b) a way of presenting the results of that examination.

Historical research in education differs from other types of educational research in that the historian discovers data through a search of historical sources. In other types of educational research, the research creates data by making observations and administering tests in order to describe present events and present performance (Borg & Gall, 1979).
Borg & Gall (1979, p. 803) state that any competent researcher is a historian. This is because research involves reviewing the literature to determine what investigations and theoretical work have already been done on a particular problem. The search for relevant documents and the interpretation of their significance are tasks that characterize the work of empirical researchers and historians alike.

The essential steps involved in doing a historical research project are as follows: "Define the problems or questions to be investigated; search for sources of historical facts; summarize and evaluate the historical sources; and present the pertinent facts within an interpretive frame-work" (Borg & Gall, 1979, p. 803).

The simple desire to acquire knowledge about previously unexamined phenomena has been a major impulse in historical inquiry (Beach, 1969). Biographies have been an important subcategory of histories written out of a sustained curiosity combined with a conviction that the subject matter merits the effort. Beach (1969, p. 563) notes that histories of specific schools (or churches) might be termed biographies of institutions, but they usually prove much less satisfactory than accounts of individual lives. This is largely due to a chauvinism which frequently underlies institutional histories. For this reason, it was better to study Dr. W. A. Criswell as an educational leader than it would be to study the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. It also helped to study the philosophical and educational
contributions of W. A. Criswell for a dissertation at the University of North Texas rather than at Criswell College. This helped to maintain more objectivity in the study.

The historian tries to think and feel like the person he is studying, yet knows he may have both more facts and greater insight (because of the passing of time) than the person had at the time. Virtually any work of history will include conclusions that the author wishes to be accepted on the basis of sheer faith in his knowledge. Such conclusions are necessary to give the work its sense of drama, its ring of authenticity, and its entitlement to human interest (Beach, 1969).

The historical method consists of (a) collection of probable sources of information, (b) the examination of those sources for genuineness, and (c) the analysis of the sources proved genuine for their credible particulars (Gottschalk, 1967, p. 10). This refers to both external and internal criticism respectively.

The historical research for this study was done by a systematic search of primary and secondary sources that provided pertinent information about the pastorate of Dr. W. A. Criswell. "Primary sources include the testimonies of eye witnesses, ones who were present at the events being described" (Beach, 1969, p. 10). Primary sources were interviewed for this study, and were selected because of their personal contact with Criswell over several years. These primary sources are people who worked with him
as administrators, church staff, and as members of the Board of Deacons of the church.

Other primary sources used were written and printed materials from the church such as institutional memoranda, correspondence, committee reports, budget reports, legal records, self-study reports, handbooks, catalogs, church newspapers, and other date from the church archives.

"A secondary source is the testimony of anyone who is not an eyewitness, one not present at the events he describes" (Gottschalk, 1967, p. 53). Secondary sources for this study included personal interviews or telephone conversations of other pastors, former staff members, and friends of First Baptist Church and of W. A. Criswell. Other secondary sources included local newspapers, national Christian magazines and journals.

"Human Documents" are defined as "an account of individual experience which reveals the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life" (Gottschalk, 1967, p. 12). The "personal document" has been defined as any self-revealing record that intentionally or unintentionally yields information regarding the structure, dynamics and functioning of the author's mental life. While much of the material for the study came from primary human documents, Dr. Criswell himself was interviewed on several occasions in order to gain as much personal documentation as possible.

After material was collected -- and during the collection process --
materials were examined for external validity (as to the reliability and likelihood of deceit or error in the material) and internally (for an analysis of credible details including author, date, and primary or secondary source) (Gottschalk, 1947, p. 28-35).

The final step in the process of the study was synthesis. This involved selecting, arranging, emphasizing or minimizing details and placing them in some sort of causal sequence. "In general, whatever arrangement other than the chronological is used, it is good practice to adopt the chronological from within each sub-division. That is, after all, the way history happens" (Gottschalk, 1967, p. 51).

In doing historical research, there were five problems that need to be avoided. The first of these was to avoid "presentism" or the imposition of modern patterns of thought upon the minds of a different era. Avoiding presentism is often equated with being objective in historical research. This has proven particularly difficult for historians concerned with education. "They tend to be keenly aware of current educational practices and policies and to have strong views about them, and are tempted to make their history serve these views" (Beach, 1969).

Second, the problem of variability of personality needed to be avoided. The sophisticated historian needs but look upon his own development to perceive that a static portrait of the personality or ideas of any historical figure may be a good likeness for only a brief span of life. Personalities
change, ideas grow and become different. Even the greatest characters and minds of the past had to endure growing pains. The historian disregards an essential part of his task if he speaks to them as if they were always full grown and invariable. "That kind of error resembles the over-simplification that induces historians sometimes to write of a period of history as if it had a single dominant aspect that made attention to its other aspects unnecessary" (Gottschalk, 1967, p. 58).

Third, was the problem of influence. Many historical studies try to estimate the influence of an individual or a writing, or an idea, or a school of thought, or an episode upon subsequent developments. Since the idea of influence is rather abstract and there is no generally accepted standard of measurement for it, such an effort is likely to lead to error, or at least disagreement among experts. "It is conceivable that a person or thing may be mentioned often and yet be less influential than a person or thing mentioned seldom" (Gottschalk, 1967, p. 58).

Fourth, was the problem of values. Any judgment regarding the significance, the greatness, or the influence of a person much always ask what would have happened if he or she had not lived. That is as near as the historian can come to the process in the natural sciences whereby the investigator removes a factor in order to determine its function in an experiment. But in our present state of knowledge, it is probably impossible to establish objective criteria for such speculation in history.
Fifth, the problem of reaction must not be overlooked. An intriguing aspect of the problem of historical influence is that of reaction against an antecedent person or event. Only rarely does it happen that a leading personality, a great book, an original idea, a significant action, an extraordinary product of the human individual creates among his contemporaries less favorable than favorable reaction. When it does, one is usually safe attributing the preponderance of favorable reaction to the high degree of conformity of that product to the surrounding cultural pattern. That is why so many original ideas have been contemporaneously neglected or "howled down" and why so many truly creative persons are said to have "lived before their times." When such ideas or persons are too far ahead of their times they have little or no effect on their own generations either by direct influence or by the reaction against them; they may merely be overlooked. But often they have contemporary significance both because some people welcome them and because others rise up against them. (Criswell has experienced both extremes.) At all events, reaction against antecedent developments is a frequent and striking "cause" of historical events (Gottschalk, 1967, pp. 61-62).

Finally, Barzun (1970, p. 58) lists six virtues of anyone engaged in historical research. These are: (a) accuracy (if history is the story of past facts, those facts must be ascertained); (b) love of order (there must be a system developed for reading, noting, comparing, verifying, indexing,
grouping, and organizing); (c) logic (the ready and practical application to
the perplexities of library research); (d) honesty (put it down as you find it);
(e) self-awareness (making personal bias and standards of judgment known
to the reader); and (f) imagination (creativity in finding sources,
interviewing and in synthesizing).
CHAPTER II

THE SETTING OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, DALLAS, 1944

On July 7, 1944 the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Dr. George W. Truett, died. He had been ill for several years. Since 1938 his health had been failing. Until that time Truett's physical condition had always been sturdy and durable. In 1938 he was seventy-two years old and faced his first real illness. By the fall of that year Truett was sent to south Texas for the winter to rest and recover. He did recuperate to some degree but by 1941 he was ill again. In 1943 he was stricken with what proved to be his final illness. Although no official medical report was issued, those closest to Truett report that his illness was a cancerous condition in the bone of his left thigh.

In January, 1944, a resolution was passed by the board of deacons which permitted Truett a six month leave of absence. No one wanted to think Dr. Truett would soon die. Somehow they hoped he would escape that final appointment all men must keep. Prayers and tears were offered on behalf of their beloved pastor of forty-seven years. Truett, however, wanted to spare the church further uncertainty regarding what to do with their languishing situation. In June, 1944, he wrote his letter of resignation. Naturally the resignation was declined by both the deacons and the church body. Although
the resignation was not accepted the appointment of an associate pastor was recommended. On July 7, 1944, Dr. Truett died while still recognized as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas.

The funeral was perhaps the most widely attended event in Dallas history until that time. Flags were lowered to half-mast. On that Monday all county work stopped at 3:00 p.m. by order of the Commissioners Court to allow county employees to attend the funeral. The city virtually came to a stand still to pay tribute to Dr. Truett.

Although initially no one verbally spoke of it, who would take Dr. George W. Truett's place? Who would fill his shoes? Who would carry on the work? Truett's years at First Baptist were great, but now they were over. Would the church languish and die? Had the glory departed with him? On whose shoulders would the mantle of leadership be passed? At that time no one knew. Truett, in a memorial service in Waco in 1931, had been quoted as saying, "God buries the workman, but the work goes on!" Now it was time to test the accuracy of his statement.

The Climate of the Church

It is important to understand the climate of the First Baptist Church at that time. Truett had been the pastor of the Church for 47 years. He had been the only pastor most of the church had even known. There had never been a pulpit committee to search for a new pastor. Truett had become synonymous with the institution. The church remained in a state of shock. It
was unthinkable that anyone could take Truett’s place. Yet as Truett himself stated, "The work goes on."

Therefore a successor had to be found. But what kind of man should be sought? A younger man with life, vigor and vitality? A scholar who had prestigious credentials? An orator who, like Truett, would capture the listening ear of his audience? Could all these qualities be found in one individual? Most importantly to the congregation, who was God’s choice? The search began.

Many prophets of despair predicted that the first man to follow Truett would fail. They felt the church would continually compare the successor to Truett and "pick him apart." Prognostications were made concerning the future of the congregation. People were beginning to move away from downtown Dallas into the suburbs. Only devotion to Truett had kept them loyal to the downtown church. Were all the rumors true? Was the "golden age" over?

The Recommendation Regarding W. A. Criswell

The church in conference appointed a committee of seven people to bring before the church the man they would suggest to be the next pastor. The committee consisted of six deacons and Mrs. Earl Smith who headed the Women’s Missionary Union (WMU). The committee included: F.M. Ryburn, Chairman; Orville Grover, Secretary; Chesley W. Brown; Ralph Baker; Robert H. Coleman; Paul Danna and Mrs. Earl B. Smith.
Because of Truett's prolonged illness the church had been in a position to host a long line of well known preachers in recent months. Among those who filled the pulpit in the early transitional days were such leading Baptist ministers as Dr. E. D. Head, Dr. W. R. White, Dr. Louie D. Newton, Dr. Duke McCall, Dr. Ellis A. Fuller, Dr. Ralph Herring, and many others. Several of these were considered potential pastors for the church (McBeth, 1968, p. 220). But this decision was not to be made hastily. More candidates had to be reviewed. The committee also took recommendations from several sources. Dozens of unsolicited recommendations also came in. There were thousands of preachers in the Southern Baptist Convention and the committee felt it important to carefully review each candidate. After all, Truett had served faithfully for 47 years and whoever followed him needed to be a man of noble character.

After a period of time the committee noticed that most all of their recommendations had come from preachers. They decided to ask a layman for his opinion. This seemed to be a wise decision in view of the fact many preachers "traded" recommendations with other preachers.

The most prominent layman they knew was Mr. John L. Hill of the Broadman Press of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Hill had preached as a layman from time to time for Dr. Truett at the First Baptist Church. The people of the church knew him well. Hill traveled extensively; therefore, the committee felt he should know what
was transpiring in the Southern Baptist Convention and who he might recommend to succeed Truett.

When the committee contacted Hill he quickly responded, "There is only one man in all the earth for you, and that is Dr. W. A. Criswell who is presently pastoring the First Baptist Church of Muskogee, Oklahoma" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 222). Hill had met Criswell earlier in Kentucky and had only heard him preach once at a Brotherhood meeting. Evidently Hill was deeply moved by the young "fiery" preacher.

When the committee received Hill's letter they were amused. None on the committee had ever heard of Criswell. But they added his name to their list and continued the process. After several more weeks of work the committee tried to narrow their choice to three names. The committee again turned to Hill for help. The committee called Hill and told him of their idea to narrow the choice to three individuals. Criswell was not included. Hill told them Criswell was still his choice to be their man.

The committee asked Dr. Hill when he had last heard Criswell preach. He replied, "As a student I heard him speak one time to a little handful of men at Smith's Grove, Kentucky." The pulpit members were stunned. "Is that the only time you have ever heard him preach?" Dr. Hill replied, "Yes." The committee responded, "Well, what makes you so sure he is God's man for us?" Dr. Hill replied, "I just know it. I am telling you the truth, he is God's man for this church" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 160).
The committee respected Hill and decided the least they could do was invite Criswell to preach. One time would not hurt anything and, again, Hill's opinion carried significant influence with the committee members.

Criswell was sent a letter explaining how fellow preachers had been trying to keep Dr. Truett's church alive in the final years of his illness. Now, since Truett was dead, preachers were continuing their kindness in preaching for the church. The committee realized they had come upon a unique way of reviewing preachers without coming right out and stating they were a possible candidate. The committee wrote Criswell and asked him to choose a Sunday in August and come preach for them.

When the letter arrived Criswell was in Ridgecrest, North Carolina preaching at the Baptist Campgrounds. His wife Betty opened the letter. She called her husband and read him the letter.

Criswell responded, "Why, I will not do that. I will not go to a church that is pastorless and preach. I just don't do it and I am not going to do it there" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 157).

His wife explained that she felt this time the situation was different. "They have been preaching for Dr. Truett for a year and now that he is dead they are continuing to preach for him to keep the church alive. I think you ought to accept this time." A reluctant Criswell said, "I will not do it."

"Well," she said, "I am going to accept for you!" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 157). So, Betty Criswell sent them a telegram stating that the fourth
Sunday in August, 1944, her husband would be there to preach for them. Criswell noted, "When I got back to Muskogee there was not anything for me to do but to pack up and go to Dallas" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 157).

The Dream

Before Criswell had been contacted by the church he had experienced an unusual dream. The dream occurred after Truett's death but before he was contacted to come preach. Because Criswell is not clairvoyant or overly mystical he did not think too much about it. He simply accepted it as "just one of those things that happened to me" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 159).

In the dream he was seated in the auditorium of the First Baptist Church in Dallas. (He had only been in the auditorium once in his life and that was when he had been a student at Baylor. In 1928, sixteen years earlier, a Baptist Student Union Convention was held in Dallas and Criswell attended.) Criswell did not make too much of the dream nor tell anyone of it at the time.

We sat in the bend of the horseshoe balcony on my right as I face it from the pulpit. The three of us went into the balcony and the man in front of me sat down, and then I sat down and then the man on the right of me sat down. The three of us sat down together. The church was jammed with people and the front of it was filled with flowers. In the center was a casket and the people were weeping, crying and sobbing everywhere. Then Criswell states that he asked, "Why are all these people crying?" The reply was made to him, "The great pastor is dead. Dr. Truett is dead." Criswell continues, "I sat there in that seat in the balcony looking at the great mass of people and the wilderness of flowers in front of the auditorium and listening to the throngs of people in the auditorium crying. Suddenly the man on my right, who had
entered the sanctuary with me, put his hand on my right knee and said, 'You must go down and preach for my people.' I turned and looked at the man and it was Dr. Truett. I said, 'Oh, sir, not I. I could never do that.' Then he put pressure on my knee again and said, 'Yes, yes, you must go down and preach to my people and remember to preach to them out of your heart.' Then Criswell states he turned to Truett with tears in his own eyes and said, "Ambassador of God, I will give the best I have in my heart." Then the dream went away. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 159)

Shortly thereafter another unusual situation occurred. Before Criswell was contacted by the committee, a close friend, Cornell Garner, stopped Criswell one day and asked him if he had been contacted by the First Baptist Church in Dallas. Criswell replied, "Why no, certainly not." Years later Criswell asked Dr. Garner why he had asked him if he had been contacted by the church in Dallas. (Criswell thought perhaps Garner had talked to them about a possible recommendation.) Garner replied, "No, I just knew they were going to do it. I knew you were going to be the next pastor of that church. I felt it from God." Garner further stated, "You know I started to write the Pulpit Committee of the First Baptist Church of Dallas and tell them to contact you, but I thought it would be a denial of the Spirit of God. I realized if God wants him there, God will do it!" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 160).

As Criswell reflects back on these occurrences he believes God was slowly opening the door for the transition to occur. Criswell believes God sends confirming signs whenever He wants a person to do something. It appeared to Criswell that these events were "confirming signs." But, not
only did a transition have to occur in the church, it had to occur in Criswell’s heart as well. Criswell did not feel in reality he would ever be offered the position because there were so many older ministers with more maturity who were already preaching there. Criswell was only 35 years old at that time. Surely he was too young or inexperienced.

The Trip to Dallas

Shortly the end of August approached. As he boarded the MK&T train for the ride to Dallas he thought back over the years of his life and now the opportunity that stood before him. He would give it his best (as he had promised Truett in the dream).

When he stood in the pulpit to preach on that hot August morning he preached as fervently as he knew how. One member noted that Criswell almost tore his Bible to pieces so fervently did he preach. The church, especially the pulpit committee, was more impressed with Criswell than anyone else they had heard up until that time. His presence demanded a sense of attention. The people in the church sat up and took notice as they had not done for months. There was something powerful in his presence and preaching.

Criswell was a screamer. He did not reason with his congregation as Truett had done; he shouted sincerely at them. He did not stand straight in the pulpit as Truett had done. Criswell was restless, gesticulating and pacing back and forth as he spoke. Not all those who heard him liked him, but they did listen. (Reavis, 1984, p. 237)

Although Criswell was a younger man, he had all the qualities that had
been mentioned by several different people when Truett passed off the scene. Criswell had life, vigor and vitality. His academic credentials included a PhD degree from the mother Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He was an orator who captured the ear of every audience to whom he spoke. He had several years of experience. And most importantly of all, the "hand of God" seemed to be upon him. W. A. Criswell became a serious candidate for the pastorate at First Baptist Church, Dallas.

After the message was over Criswell returned to Oklahoma. He felt that God had blessed him in the sermon and he would be coming to Dallas. He also had his doubts, however, because there was so much maturity in the other candidates. Logically they would be offered the position ahead of him. The committee decided several representatives needed to travel to Muskogee, Oklahoma to hear Criswell preach in his own pulpit. On September 17, 1944, three committee members, Ralph Baker, Chesley Brown and Orville Groner entered the First Baptist Church of Muskogee, Oklahoma. They entered at different times and sat alone. They did not want to draw attention to their presence or cause unnecessary pressure on the young pastor. As they observed that morning, the future call was taking shape:

His sermon had more power than polish. At times his rich full voice was well-modulated, but again he might shout for emphasis and the clenched fist smashed again and again against the sturdy pulpit. A more earnest young man the committee had never heard. They talked together about him. They talked to many citizens of Muskogee, Baptist
and non-Baptist, about him. They returned to Dallas convinced they should recommend him as the next pastor of the First Baptist Church. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 225)

The Call Extended to Criswell

On Wednesday night, September 27, 1944, the church was called into an official conference. The committee report was read by Judge F.M. Ryburn. "We recommend that our church extend a call to Dr. W. A. Criswell to serve as pastor of this church" (McBeth, 1968, p. 225). Some discussion followed including the idea that the committee recommend three men instead of one and allow the church to vote for one of the three. Then another "unusual" set of circumstances unfolded.

Mr. Carr Collins, President of the Fidelity Union Life Insurance Company and one of the leading deacons in the church recalled a situation that had occurred years earlier which involved Criswell. During the depression Baylor University launched the Greater Baylor Campaign of 1931, trying to raise $500,00.00 for the school. Criswell had gone to Collins and told him he wanted him to help. Although Criswell only pastored two little country churches at the time, he had a love for Baylor, his alma mater and wanted to do all he could to help them reach their goal. Mr. Collins was impressed with Criswell's drive and ambition.

When the campaign was to be launched on the Baylor campus, Mr. Collins had laryngitis. Collins met with the President of Baylor, S. P. Brooks, and told him about Criswell. The two called for Criswell and
explained the situation. They expressed unusual confidence in him. Criswell told them he would be glad to help and would do the best he could. The meeting had a long lasting impact upon Criswell. The campaign was launched and was a tremendous success. Their confidence in Criswell would help shape his future.

Now that Criswell was being considered as the next pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, all these events began to return to the mind of Carr Collins. He stood up and told the church of his former dealings with Criswell and what had transpired. Many witnesses feel it was that voice that carried the day. The committee's report was accepted by unanimous standing vote and the call was extended to W. A. Criswell to become the next pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas.

It is worthy to note from the church archives that there was a list of twenty-two names who were under active consideration at one time or another. The list included some of the most outstanding Baptist ministers in the nation at that time. All of the names were pencilled out at various times. Only the fifth name from the bottom of the list remains intact. It is "W. A. Criswell."

After the meeting that night, Bob Coleman called Criswell and told him of the church's decision. Criswell and his wife prayed and wept together, seeking God's leadership to guide them in their decision. Criswell had held Truett's work in awe as the greatest ministry in the Christian world. He
wanted to be sure the church understood he had to be himself.

I can't be like Dr. Truett as much as I would like to be. I preach like a holy-roller. I know it and I can't help it. I have always spoken vigorously. I know that is a weakness. I have all my heart and soul in ministry and the Gospel. I am not proud that I sometimes shout and my voice cracks. I just get so interested and excited that I just can't help it. (Criswell, 1956, p. 1)

Criswell also informed the committee that he wanted full control of two areas: the pulpit and the staff. He would decide the content of his sermons (as well as who would preach if he should be absent), and he would have the final word as to the hiring and firing of church staff. The committee assured him of his request. The first Sunday in October, Criswell went back to Dallas to preach as the newly called pastor.

Criswell's Acceptance

Criswell returned to Muskogee and sent the following telegram to Bob Coleman and the church:

After these days of prayer, if all the membership of First Baptist Church Dallas still believes God has called me to be their pastor, that call is accepted in the name of Jesus. Let it be to us all a call of loyalty and love to our Savior such as we have never known. Continue to pray without ceasing and to yield the leadership of the church to the Holy Spirit. We shall come to love and work with you the fifteenth of November, and now through the years may God bless us as pastor and people. We love you already and pledge you the best of our lives. There is much to do. Let us do it with all our might in the strength of the Lord. (Criswell, 1944, p. 1)

W. A. Criswell was now the new pastor. His first sermon would set the direction for his future ministry. The text of his sermon was "There stood
by me the angel of God saying 'Fear not'" (Acts 27:23). He decided to face the issue of being Truett's successor head on. He paid tribute to Truett but indicated the church would not live in the past. He also quoted Truett's own words, "God buries the workman, but the work goes on." Criswell knew his first sermon would set the tone for the future.

Some of Job's comforters outside this church are saying that the man to follow Dr. Truett will be a miserable failure because the church was built around the incomparable personality with the silvery hair and the mellifluous voice ... that the golden age of the church is over ... that the church itself will die. Do you and I have the answer? We do! When I came to Dallas, Mrs. Truett prayed for me and said, "You will be as my son. My husband built the church not around himself but around Jesus Christ. And don't you be afraid of the task you have been called to assume." (Criswell, 1944, November, p. 1)

The new Pastor faced his challenge and began his assignment. The historic church had been in decline and there was much work ahead to do. If Criswell's confidence was any indicator of future success, a new day was about to dawn.
CHAPTER III

THE MAN, W. A. CRISWELL

In order to understand the drive and determination behind W.A. Criswell, it is necessary to review important information regarding his family and personal background.

Early Years

Criswell was born December 19, 1909, just east of the Texas Panhandle in Eldorado, Oklahoma. He was given no first or middle name, just the initials "W. A." He took his name from his father. "I just took it for granted in later life when I had to have some kind of name, because they had 'Junior' on that name, I just supposed I was Wallie Amos Criswell, Jr. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 3). His father was a widower and brought two girls and a boy into a new marriage with Anna Currie. Anna had been previously married also. The union had ended in divorce. She had two girls. Criswell's states as long as his mother lived she never mentioned the previous marriage or the fate of her first husband (Reavis, 1984, pp. 235-236). After W. A. Criswell, Sr. and Anna Currie married they had two sons, W. A. Jr. and Currie. The other children were grown and gone so the only real sibling with whom Criswell associated was his brother Currie.

When W. A. was five years old the family moved to Texline, a small
community in the far northwestern corner of the Panhandle, a mile from the New Mexico border. Texline was mostly a railroad stop between Denver and Fort Worth. Many in the community worked for the railroad. The elder Criswell received a piece of government land and tried to farm it, but times were hard. In an age before irrigation many farms failed. The weather was also harsh. Little W. A. failed the third grade in school due to absences associated with the severe weather conditions. The government took the land back and the Criswell family moved into the city. At a very young age W. A. Criswell learned by experience that failure was no pleasant event. In the future this would impact his philosophy of life and ministry. Criswell developed a sincere hate for failure at a young age.

Criswell's father, W. A. Sr., entered the town's commerce as a barber and for several years was also the owner of the town's only rentable bathrub used by cowboys from nearby ranches.

There were two churches in Texline at the time, a prosperous Methodist church and a poorer Baptist church. The Criswell's attended the Baptist church. The elder Criswell was a devoted follower of J. Frank Norris, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas, also known as "the Tornado." Anna Criswell was an admirer of Dr. George W. Truett, the southern gentleman, who pastored the First Baptist Church of Dallas. Criswell still recalls arguments his parents had over the controversial J. Frank Norris. The Criswell family spent much time at church enjoying
evenings at church socials. When itinerant preachers and revivalists came to Texline they often stayed in the Criswell's home. This would prove to create a profound impression on young W. A. Criswell. During these times he would learn a great deal about Baptist life.

One Wednesday morning W. A. asked permission from his mother to be dismissed from school in order to attend the revival services. She agreed. The Reverend John Hicks, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dalhart, Texas, was the preacher. He also was staying in the Criswell's home during the two-week revival. He and little W. A. had become good friends.

That morning when Brother Hicks finished his sermon W. A. turned to his mother. She was crying. She looked at her son and asked him if he would accept the Lord as his Savior. The young child began to weep and said, "Oh, Mother, yes." He went down the aisle and was presented publicly by the pastor of the little Baptist congregation, L. S. Hill. He was baptized the following Sunday. W. A. Criswell had been speaking all week with Reverend Hicks about becoming a preacher himself one day. Now that he had been converted, the journey could begin. In thinking back over those days, Criswell reflects, "I knew God wanted me to be a preacher and I had the same conviction then I have now. I cannot remember when I was not going to be a preacher" (Keith, 1973, p. 21).

Although Criswell’s parents were elated that their son had become a Christian, they were sorely disappointed to hear of their son’s desire to
become a preacher. Though devout Baptist, the Criswells feared what the future would hold for their son should he go that route. Every preacher they had ever known was poorly educated, made little money and was in constant danger of being fired. His parents hoped he would outgrow his childish fancy.

Criswell's father was once the chairman of a committee to dismiss a preacher. He told young W. A., "That was the saddest thing I ever did in my life. I would never do that again. If I live to be a million years old, I would never do that again. I will never allow myself to have any part in the firing of a preacher" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 20). Criswell's father did not want his own son to ever be part of such an experience. He gave the impression to his son, "If you are going to be a preacher I hope you will be like Frank Norris" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 22).

It appears Criswell's father had two mental images of a minister. One was that of a lazy, undisciplined, sorry preacher. The other was that of J. Frank Norris, "The Tornado." Norris was a colorful figure to say the least. When his church auditorium burned in January, 1912, Norris charged that his enemies were responsible. Following an investigation, the district attorney of Tarrant County accused Norris of committing arson in order to build a larger church. A grand jury agreed and Norris was tried for perjury and arson in April, 1912, but was acquitted (Russell, 1976, p. 34).

On July 17, 1926, a man who opposed Norris entered the second floor
study of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth. He had called earlier and threatened the Pastor. When D. E. Chipps arrived, sharp words were exchanged between himself and Norris. Soon four shots rang out and Chips fell mortally wounded. A grand jury indicted Norris for murder. His attorney argued that Norris had shot in self-defense when a "stranger of unsavory reputation under the influence of alcohol provided apparent danger" (Russell, 1976, p. 36). A jury in Austin tried the case. After only forty minutes of deliberation, Norris was found not guilty. Such was the kind of pastor that W. A. Criswell, Sr. admired. One with power, control and a sense of authority.

Criswell's mother Anna feared her son would starve to death as a preacher. She had dreams of her son becoming a physician like her own father. She even instructed him how to reply when asked what profession he would seek when grown, "I am going to be a doctor like my grandfather Currie" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 3). Annie Currie feared that if her son were to give his life to the ministry it would be one of penury and want, always being unpaid and unsupported with the possibility of being fired at any moment. Again, however, Annie Currie had an admirable view of Dr. George W. Truett, perhaps the most famous preacher in the south. Somewhere between the controversial and colorful J. Frank Norris and the dignified George W. Truett, W. A. Criswell would one day find his place.

Truett and Norris were as different as day and night in their
personalities, but both preached the Bible. Norris often preached on the "second coming of Christ." Truett, however, almost completely avoided the topic. Truett told close associates that he did not want to be "identified" with Norris in any way. (For a full discussion of this topic, see Appendix A.)

As Criswell grew up, he developed an insatiable appetite for reading. His life centered around school and church. It is especially interesting to note Criswell's love for the Horatio Alger ("rags to riches") stories. "Those stories thrilled me to death. I identified with every one of those poor boys and I lived his life all the way up from the bottom to the top" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 15). In time, Criswell would live out this experience in real life.

Criswell also borrowed books from his pastor in Texline, Brother Campbell. Most of these books were biographies of great men: Hannibal, Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoleon, Aristotle and others. All of these biographies would influence and shape the life of Criswell.

As a boy Criswell would attend every religious encampment that had a meeting. Criswell's pastor, Brother Campbell, played an important role in his Christian growth. He took him to meetings which influenced him greatly in the direction of becoming a minister.

Criswell was carefully protected as a child by his parents. His father would not allow a deck of cards in the house. Dancing was an evil along with gambling and swearing. The home was very devout, built around the
church. Anna Criswell protected her son as well. She would not allow her son to go swimming for fear he would drown, hunting for fear he might be shot, or to run around with other boys for fear he might pick up bad language. His life was consumed with church, home and school activities.

When Criswell was twelve years old the town of Texline held a tent revival. The guest preacher was Brother Whaley, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Memphis, Texas. At a morning service Whaley made an appeal for those who felt called to full time Christian service. Criswell went down the aisle under that tent and gave his life publicly to be a preacher. In the same meeting an older man also "surrendered to preach." Everyone was deeply touched by the older man's decision since he was already well into his years. Criswell recalls, "Everybody just thought it was so amazingly wonderful that this man would give his life to be a preacher, of course, just a little boy such as I was, nobody paid any particular attention to me" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 38). This would play an important role in Criswell’s future dealings with children as shall be seen.

Criswell’s Education

Criswell was ready to enter high school but the high school in Texline was not accredited. Anna Criswell wanted her son to get a good education so she decided to take her two sons and move to Amarillo. In Amarillo, Criswell developed a fondness for music. He played in three bands: the Hi-Y band, the Municipal band of Amarillo and the Amarillo High school Band.
He also furthered his speaking skills by joining the debating club. After speaking on one occasion at the Rotary Club in Amarillo, a lawyer offered to send him to college and pay all his expenses if he would return and work for the firm in the summer and upon graduation. Criswell explained that his only concern was with becoming a preacher. The lawyer understood and encouraged Criswell by stating, "You're giving your life to a greater calling and to a greater profession. God bless you in it" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 30).

In Amarillo, Criswell's mother Anna rented a house, then sub-rented rooms from their house to individuals. She took in sewing and baked pies to sell through the local drugstore to make additional money. Criswell's father remained in Texline. This family situation did not seem abnormal to Criswell because of his mother's strong desire for his success. "Whether it was for good or ill--my mother programmed everything for me. She had great ambition for me" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 43).

A few years later, W. A. Criswell Sr. moved to Amarillo to join the family. Again Criswell notes:

It was just one of those seemingly normal things because my mother was so given to my education and to the preparing of me for this work that she wanted me to do ... it was just an accepted thing in the family such as your eating breaking in the morning. It was just that normal. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 44)

In a letter to one of the members of First Baptist Church, Dallas, in 1980, Criswell responds to the question, "What did your mother do to
Several things in the life and care of my Mother for me greatly shaped every dream, vision and effort that I possessed in my young life. Let me list them one after another:

1. She loved me devotedly and devoutly, and I knew it from the days of my consciousness and through all the years that followed. To have someone love you is the richest possession in the earth.

2. Mother insisted that I get the finest education possible and available. That meant a doctor's degree, whether it was a doctor of medicine as was her father and as she wished for me, or whether it was the highest degree in any other profession into which go. She saw to it that I went to school every day of my life.

3. My mother sacrificed constantly in order that I might have the finest training afforded in the barren country in which I grew up. By this I mean lessons in music, lessons, in expression, lessons in public speaking, typewriter lessons and all kinds of things to help a boy grow in the use of his mind.

4. Most of all and above all, my Mother placed before me the image of Christ and the service due Him in the church, in personal life, and in all the energies to which we might devote every God-given talent to Him. There were no services at the church we did not attend. There were no efforts on the part of the church in which we did not share. The church was as much a vital part of our lives as breathing and sleeping and eating.

5. My mother always wanted me to excel. Second best was not good enough. She wanted me to be the best in whatever I was doing. That put in my heart an insatiable imagination to succeed in the things that I felt God had called me to place in heart and hand.

This is just a few of the things that went into the making of my upbringing as a boy. (W. A. Criswell, personal communication, June 5, 1980)

Criswell’s father had little influence on his son’s education or life. In his later years, however, Criswell states that he came to appreciate his father and the sacrifices he made for him (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 46).

In Amarillo, Criswell excelled in school. In addition to being in the
band and on the debating team, he made straight A's in his school work. His favorite subject was English. Still, however, his life almost entirely centered around the church.

On one occasion, Dr. George W. Truett, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, came to Amarillo to hold a revival meeting. He also took up a special offering for the Baptist denomination. This had a profound influence upon Criswell. Shortly thereafter at 17 years of age, W. A. Criswell was licensed to preach by the First Baptist Church in Amarillo. Dr. G. L. Yates, pastor of the church, knew Criswell well and encouraged him greatly in the ministry. As Criswell's high school days came to an end, his mother Anna visited several schools. She looked at each one and decided her son, W. A., should attend Baylor.

Although W. A. Sr. had moved to Amarillo by this time, Anna was again pulling up roots and moving with her two sons to Waco. She felt it was important to help W. A. get started in college. She shut down all she was doing in Amarillo, moved to Waco, got a larger home, and started renting out rooms again. W. A.'s brother Currie was enrolled in the high school in Waco. Once settled in Waco, W. A. Criswell became active in the Seventh and James Street Baptist Church. There he entered into his first church role as the leader of the 17-year-old Training Union.

During Criswell's first year at Baylor, he prayed and asked God to help him make his way through school by preaching. He did not feel he was
above menial labor, but he wanted to fully devote himself to the pastorate. By the beginning of his second year in school, his prayer had been answered. His mother saw that he was making his own way in life so she returned to Amarillo to be with W. A. Sr.

Criswell loved Baylor. He entered into the academic life with fervor. Two professors would greatly influence his life. Dr. A. J. Armstrong was his English professor. Although Armstrong could be stern, he inspired Criswell greatly. He made Criswell have a desire to excel, study and preach. Criswell majored in English under Dr. Armstrong's supervision.

Dr. Armstrong played a profound role in Criswell's education. He taught Criswell by example that a man could be both intellectually astute and yet hold to the Christian faith. This impressed Criswell because there was a public notion among those in academe that to believe the Bible and have faith in God perhaps was a sign of mental instability:

It's easy for a young man in the school to get to the conclusion that these fellows are devout because they don't have any sense. You're a Christian because you don't know any better. You love Jesus because you're just you're provincial, you've closed your mind. Well, that's not so! And to see a wonderful professor who just is an excellent man in every way, and to see him at the same time devout and an humble follower of Christ, that does something to you. It did something to me. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, pp. 110-111)

As time passed Criswell devoted himself to his studies. He knew he wanted to attend graduate school.

One of the reasons that I wanted to go to Brown and to Yale was so
many times I ran into the attitude that a preacher is an ignoramous, that he's not a learned man; he's not a man of parts, and that just always crushed me. I was so sensitive to that even as a youth, and I wanted to go to Brown and to Yale in order to show that a man who loved God and preached the gospel was not per se thereby an ignoramous, a man that didn't know any better. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 120)

Armstrong was the faculty advisor for the Sigma Tau Delta fraternity, the most prestigious fraternity on campus. Members of the fraternity were selected by Dr. Armstrong. Criswell's senior year he was elected President of the organization. Criswell admits he was fortunate to be one of Armstrong's "pets" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 102).

Dr. Henry Trantham was Criswell's Greek teacher and another great influence in his life. Criswell studied Greek for two years under him. The class had eight students and met in Trantham's home during the week. Dr. Trantham told Criswell he was very smart and could understand things quickly. That encouraged Criswell to study and excel even more in school. Along with the encouragement that came from these important men in Criswell's life also came the feeling that there was little he could not do.

Criswell's Pastorates as a Student

During Criswell's freshman year he preached in many different settings. Again, he was seeking a pastorate which would help him earn his way through school. One Sunday he was preaching in Mount Calm, Texas. They liked him and invited him back. The first public response to Criswell's preaching occurred in Mount Calm. A young man came down the aisle, took Criswell's hand and said, "By this token (of a handshake), I am giving my
life to be a Presbyterian preacher!" (Criswell, 1946, July, p.1).

Criswell continued to preach in various churches. In a short time Marlow Baptist Church called him to be their pastor. The church was located 60 miles from Waco. Criswell went to school during the week and travelled to Marlow every weekend to preach. He was only 18 years old at the time.

While at Marlow something would occur that would forever shape Criswell's philosophy of education in church growth. Marlow Baptist Church was out from town a short distance. The Presbyterian church was in the center of the community and offered the only Sunday School program. Not being able to have a Sunday School of his own, Criswell began Sunday evening Training Union for young people. No other church offered an evening program. The strong emphasis on the youth caused the Baptist Church to fill up. Criswell saw that the parents would follow their children to church if they enjoyed it. Again, this would mold his philosophy of education and church growth. More shall be said about this later.

By the end of Criswell's second year at Baylor, he had been called to pastor another small church at Pecan Grove. He began to divide his time between Marlow and Pecan Grove. During these early days he held his first revival meeting at Pecan Grove. After the revival Criswell was told that no church of any consequence would ever call him to pastor because he preached so badly. That concerned him greatly. He sought help from an
expression teacher. After a few lessons she asked Criswell to preach her a sermon. Afterwards she told him to return in a week and do likewise. Criswell returned the following week and preached her another sermon. Then she had a talk with him. She told him to preach from his heart as he had been doing and people would always listen to what he had to say. From that time forward Criswell learned to be himself. This would affect his philosophy of ministry in the future.

Although Criswell was president of the Ministerial Association and active in Baylor life, his real interest was centered in his country churches and furthering his preaching and speaking skills. During this time Criswell was called to pastor another small church at Mound, Texas. Mound and Pecan Grove were only a few miles apart. Criswell resigned at his church in Marlow and began to alternate Sundays between Mound and Pecan Grove.

In May, 1931, Criswell’s years at Baylor came to an end. He graduated "with high honors," majoring in English. It is worth mentioning that Criswell’s educational experience placed heavy doubts in his heart regarding his Christian faith. He minored in psychology and philosophy. Being inquisitive by nature, Criswell sought an answer for every question. Sometimes he was left with intellectual doubts. He learned to stay balanced, however, by keeping a close touch with the realities of daily life and the pain of human suffering rather than esoteric questions.

After graduation he decided to broaden his horizons, move out of the
state and attend Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Criswell had a friend attending Yale University who wanted him to attend Yale as well. There was a Quaker church in Rhode Island ready to call Criswell as pastor. Criswell was advised that Yale would prepare him for a position as a professor in a university. If he wanted to pastor, however, he was advised to attend Southern Seminary. So the decision, in the final analysis, was an easy one.

When Criswell arrived in Kentucky he knew the route he must travel. He would work his way through school by pastoring churches. Criswell and a friend attended Baptist associational meetings and both received many invitations to preach at pastorless churches. The depression had begun and many of the smaller churches could not afford to have a full-time pastor. Criswell accepted the call to pastor at Mount Washington, seven miles from Louisville. He would be there three Sundays each month. Another church in Oakland, Kentucky, located ten miles north of Bowling Green, called him as pastor on a one time per month basis. So again, Criswell was ready to begin his educational endeavors with his financial commitments in order.

Criswell was ready to begin his graduate work under the far famed A. T. Robertson. Many believe Robertson was the greatest Southern Baptist scholar who ever lived. Criswell studied under him for three years completing his Master's degree in 1934. Criswell then began his doctoral work, again, under Robertson's supervision. In the first month of study,
however, Dr. Robertson died. Dr. Hersey Davis, Robertson's associate, took his place. Davis would have a profound influence upon Criswell. Robertson was more of a stern man whereas Dr. Davis was more kindly. He would impact Criswell and his educational philosophy by example.

Criswell continued to excel in New Testament Greek, in which he majored. Old Testament Hebrew was more difficult for him largely due to time constraints. Keeping up with two churches left little time to study the Hebrew language. Also, by this time Criswell was getting older, maturing, and becoming more interested in entering his life's work as a full-time pastor rather than simply being a student.

It is also worth noting that Criswell had a double minor in seminary: one in theology and the other in contemporary social movements. He rejects the notion that he is uninterested in societal needs. There is a book entitled *The Social Conscience of W.A. Criswell* written by J. E. Towns (Dallas: Crescendo, 1977). The work goes into detail regarding Criswell's fondness for social interaction. Patterson notes, however, the book did not sell well because it was not marketed well (1986, p. 25).

No one charges Criswell with being "so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good." He stays involved in daily activities that are of interest to most people. There is even a joke about Criswell that circulates: When he got to heaven St. Peter could not locate his name in God's book. Finally after a few minutes, Peter found it. It had been listed under "real estate."
Perhaps one of the reasons the people of First Baptist Church, Dallas, respect their pastor so much is because of his keen business mind.

Criswell continued to pastor country churches while he remained at Southern Seminary for doctoral work. Criswell had met a young school teacher, Betty Harris, who also was the church pianist at Mount Washington. He desired to court her yet felt it wrong since she was a member of his church. He resigned and took another church pastorate in Woodburn, ten miles north of Bowling Green. He began alternating Sundays between Oakland and Woodburn, being half-time at each church.

On Valentines Day, February 14, 1935, Criswell married Betty Marie Harris. They lived in Bowling Green because it was centrally located to all their activities. Whether or not getting married on Valentine’s Day is a flair for the dramatic remains unknown. One thing is true, however: this is simply another example of how Criswell tried to accomplish his tasks in the best manner possible.

Criswell continued to pastor these two churches and pursue his degree. He wrote his dissertation on "The John the Baptist Movement in Relation to the Christian Movement." In May, 1937, he was awarded the PhD degree by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Pastoring in Chickasha

After graduation, W. A. and his wife did not know which direction to pursue. They prayed together and told God they would take the first church
that called Criswell as full-time pastor. They further agreed to tell no one of their secret decision.

The First Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama invited Criswell to come preach. The pastor of the church Dr. J. R. Hobbs had become incapacitated because of a heart attack. Dr. John L. Hill had recommended Criswell to Dr. Hobbs. Criswell preached at the church and Dr. Hobbs listened over the radio. Afterwards Criswell was taken to meet Dr. Hobbs. He was delighted with Criswell and told him he wanted him to be pastor of the church. Hill talked to the pulpit committee and everything seemed to be in order. It appeared Criswell would soon be called by the church as the next pastor of the First Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama.

A few weeks passed. The doctors delayed in making their final report on Dr. Hobbs. Everyone hoped he would get better. The report was finally made that Dr. Hobbs could not be pastor of the church any longer. In the meantime the First Baptist Church of Chickasha, Oklahoma called Criswell to be their new pastor. Some of the people at Chickasha had heard Criswell preach at a Bible conference in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. When their pastor, Dr. J. W. Bruner resigned to move to Texas, a vacancy was left at the church in Chickasha. Criswell was their first choice. The first official call had come. Two weeks later, however, the official call came from the First Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, a much larger and more prestigious church. But W. A. and Betty Criswell had made a promise to
God. They accepted the position in Chickasha. Hill, somewhat disturbed contacted Criswell. Criswell revealed the covenant he and his wife had earlier made with God. Hill concurred that if he had that conviction in his heart he should go.

The church in Chickasha had a membership of about two thousand. It was a nice church, by far the largest and most influential church in the city. When Criswell arrived, the church began to grow immediately. Under his leadership the church built a large tabernacle. This became a pattern Criswell seemed to follow, namely getting a building program underway at the outset of his pastorate in each location.

Although Criswell was not particularly happy in Chickasha, God blessed him in his ministry there. He does have some fond memories of that period in his career:

There was a man, a very fine businessman in Chickasha who came to visit the church. He had to stand in the door. There was no room nor seat for him, so he stood in the door and listened to me preach. After it was over he came up to me and said, "Young man, let me tell you, the preacher that can fill a church like this in Chickasha can fill the biggest auditorium in the land." Oh, I remember that so well. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 150)

Criswell’s reputation began to spread. He was invited to be active in Southern Baptist denomination work. He was placed on the Executive Board for the state of Oklahoma as well as on the Board of Trustees for Oklahoma Baptist University. He was asked to preach the state convention sermon his first year in Oklahoma and did so. This was an honor many preachers hoped
for in a lifetime. Criswell was 27 years old at the time.

Something was different about Criswell and people noticed it. Here was a well educated man with a PhD degree who preached like a "holy roller," a label that began to characterize him and his abilities. Criswell remained in Chickasha from 1937-1941 as pastor of the church.

Pastoring in Muskogee

In December, 1940, Dr. A. N. Hall, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Muskogee, Oklahoma died. He and Criswell had been friends. Criswell had visited the church in Muskogee and had spoken at a banquet. Dr. Hall, an older man, was about 75 years old at the time. He had told some of his leadership in Muskogee that if anything ever happened to him, he wanted them to call Criswell as his successor.

Dr. Hall was getting dressed on a Sunday morning, preparing to go to church. Suddenly he was stricken ill and died. He had his sermon outline on his desk to be preached that day, "My First Five Minutes in Heaven." That reality had now occurred.

The pulpit committee was appointed the second Sunday in January, 1941. At 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon Criswell was called to be their next pastor. After prayer and consideration W. A. and Betty Criswell and their two-year-old daughter Mabel Anne moved to Muskogee.

The Criswells loved Muskogee, especially Betty. God blessed them in their work and the church grew. Immediately Criswell led the church in
taking an old building, renovating it and converting it into an educational building.

While at Muskogee an interesting shift occurred in Criswell's preaching. Up until this time he had been a topical preacher, preaching on different topics each sermon. Now he began to take sections of the Bible and preach through them. Criswell notes it may have been the result of looking through Dr. Hall's personal library which was given to him by Hall's wife after his death.

It would be difficult for me to describe how much of a different world it was for me. I was fascinated by what I was doing. Instead of sermons coming laboriously and pacing wondering what in the world am I going to preach about the following Sunday, now there was so much to say and so many things to learn and to preach about that I was not going to have the length of days in which to do it. Where I left off one Sunday I would start the next. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 162)

As previously stated, the church in Muskogee flourished under Criswell's leadership. Another building program was under way and Criswell's career was expanding.

In the summer for vacation Criswell would go on preaching tours while his wife Betty and daughter Mabel Ann visited relatives in Kentucky. In August of 1944, Criswell went to Ridgecrest, North Carolina to preach at the Baptist Campgrounds. From there he went to St. Petersburg, Florida for another speaking engagement.

One month earlier, July, 1944, the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Dr. George W. Truett died. The whole Baptist world mourned his
death. Truett was in a class all alone. No one could take his place. The church had to go on, however, so they invited different preachers to come each week to help them. There was much notoriety about the ministers who were coming to preach.

As stated earlier, a letter was sent to Muskogee then forwarded to Kentucky inviting Criswell to come preach. Criswell's wife read the invitation to her husband over the phone. His initial response was negative. Betty, however, sent a telegram to Dallas and accepted for her husband. Now he felt obligated to go.

The full details of these events were explained in Chapter 1. On September 27, 1944, Criswell was called to be the new pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. A new day had come.
CHAPTER IV

THE MOVE TO DALLAS

For the third time in Criswell's brief career he had been called to follow an older man. In Chickasha he had followed Dr. J. W. Bruner who had pastored there for fifteen years. In Muskogee he followed Dr. A. N. Hall after his death. Dr. Hall had been pastor in Muskogee for 28 years. Now Criswell was called to follow Dr. Truett who had pastored the First Baptist Church, Dallas for 47 years and was Criswell's senior by over 40 years of age. Criswell's experience in those two earlier pastorates helped him immensely.

The Criswells moved into their present home on Swiss Avenue in Dallas. The Church purchased the Parsonage for $15,500.00. The home has appreciated in value over the years tremendously. The present value is in the neighborhood of $400,000.00.

Criswell humbly, but firmly, assumed the responsibilities of leadership of the First Baptist Church in October, 1944. Although there were a few families who left the church, resenting anyone following Dr. Truett, there was no significant decrease in membership.

I would suppose that there were some people who resented anybody following Dr. Truett. In fact, one family that very poignantly brought
sorrow to my heart left on that account because I was the successor of Dr. Truett, but that was the rare exception. The vast, vast body of the church received me as God's man to follow Dr. Truett. And the same affection by which they always referred to Dr. Truett as "Pastor" immediately, though I was so much younger, they used that same word in the same affection to refer to me. I was always, "Pastor." (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 167)

The church began to grow with new members immediately. There was no obstacle in Criswell's eyes too large to overcome. He was convinced God was directing him, as He always had, to preach the Gospel to all who would come and hear. Criswell felt that it was his responsibility to see that they came. He knew the kind of church he wanted to build but had not yet formulated a specific program to build it.

Criswell spent the first year getting acquainted with the church and winning the full confidence of his people. During this transition period he majored on a pulpit ministry with dynamic preaching. Criswell has often noted that his first impression of the church as he began his pulpit ministry was that of "wood." The pews were made of wood as were the bannister, railings, and panels. The crowds were not present to occupy the pews, therefore a lot of wood could be seen. Criswell was not interested in looking at "wood." He wanted to see people! The church began to grow in numbers. The reputation of this fiery young preacher began to spread.

Bob Coleman, who had been Dr. Truett's right hand man, was of tremendous help to Criswell. He provided a valuable link between the old and the new. Other members of the staff inherited by Criswell included T.
A. "Dolph" Johnson who was the Secretary-Treasurer-Clerk of the church as well as the Business Manager; Mrs. Walter Pitts, the Church Visitor; Mr. L. H. "Tap" Tapscott, Educational Director overseeing the Training Union program and the Young People's work; Mrs. J. H. Cassidy, organist and choir director; Miss Bertha Mills, Nursery Director; Cordie Porter, Church Secretary; and a custodian. But it was Bob Coleman who helped Criswell become acquainted with the church the most. The situation is amply described by historian Leon McBeth:

Over the years, the First Baptist Church had gradually become a rather staid, downtown church, ministering primarily to mature adults. Most of the deacons were past 60 years of age. The church staff, faithful as they were, was by no means numerous enough to carry a full-family centered church program. Much of the staff work rested in the hands of Bob Coleman and T.A. Johnson, both outstanding and eminently loyal men but both of advanced age. (p. 233)

Criswell did not want to neglect any of the older members of the church. He simply wanted to rebuild the image and ministry of the historic church. Criswell's desire was to create a family-centered church program that would appeal to young families and their children. Each time the leadership of the church met the elderly deacons would listen to their young pastor as he unfolded his dreams for the future. After he finished they began to explain to him why his goals and dreams would not work. "Pastor, all that sounds wonderful, it might work at other places, but not here. You see, this is an old downtown church—we reach mainly adults. The young people and young families go to the suburban churches" (McBeth, 1968, pp. 233-234).
The deacons had not yet learned that Criswell was not easily dissuaded. He would not give up. He felt he was trying to accomplish the work of God, not simply his own ideals. It is for this reason the drive and determination behind Criswell is so strong. From the pulpit, at deacons' meetings, and in private visits with individual members, he presented the dreams of a complete, well-rounded, family-centered church program in downtown Dallas. Criswell knew that if the great downtown church was destined to survive it had to become a family church. But he continued to meet opposition. After some days had passed Criswell's program was presented to the deacons for a formal vote. The future of Criswell's entire ministry was riding on that vote.

Judge Frank Ryburn was chairman of the Board of Deacons. He had been one of the seven members of the pulpit committee who recommended Criswell be called as the new pastor. He supported Criswell and his plans for the future of the church. McBeth recounts the meeting:

After warm discussion, Chairman Frank Ryburn said, "As for me, I am going with the pastor." He then asked all the others who would back Criswell's program to stand, and all but two men stood immediately to their feet. It may have seemed routine at the time, but this was one of the most significant victories Criswell ever won. From that moment he had his opportunity to see what he could build in Dallas. (p. 234)

Dr. Truett had not insisted on any particular type of church organization. Everything was relatively small. There was not a large staff. McBeth notes that administration of the Sunday School would have
frustrated Truett. Bob Coleman was the one identified in this area. Coleman was the business symbol of the church of which Truett was the spiritual symbol (McBeth, 1968, p. 237).

Truett had built the church around his pulpit ministry. People came from literally the ends of the earth to hear him speak. He stood tall and erect in the pulpit, never moving, simply preaching on different topics found in the Bible. The church looked upon its own ministry as being the preaching of Dr. Truett. There was no special attention given to church growth or expansion at the time.

If Truett had an educational structure perhaps it can be visualized in Table 1. He had a particular person in charge of each area of church life such as Sunday School or Training Union. The person in charge of that particular area of church life headed up that aspect of ministry throughout the entire church from the youngest to the oldest member. For example, the Sunday School leader led the Sunday School program for the entire church. The Sunday School leader was responsible for the the program and the curriculum for every age throughout the entire church. Regardless of age or category (nursery, beginners, primaries, juniors, youth or adults) everyone was under the supervision and direction of the Sunday School leader. This same situation existed for every area of church life. One person was responsible for the Sunday School program, another for the Training Union program, and so on throughout the entire church.
Table 1

The Educational Programming Structure of George W. Truett

Activity: Sunday School Training Union Visitation Stewardship Pastoral Care Missions

Age Groups:
Beginners
Primaries
Juniors
Youth
Young Adults
Median Adults
Older Adults

Note: Source: Author
Criswell began to turn things around. As seen in Table 2 he began to reorganize the church. There would be no Sunday School leader nor training union leader as such. The church would be divided into graded divisions and leaders would be responsible for leading and directing all the activities within their particular divisions throughout the church. Whoever led an age group would lead it completely. The Divisional Director for a particular graded age group would be responsible for the Sunday School program (for example, recruiting and training the teachers, establishing the curriculum, visiting the prospects). The Divisional Directors would also be responsible for the Training Union program, the Mission program, raising of financial pledges, pastoral care and all aspects of church programs throughout their entire division. Criswell thought in this manner every aspect of church life would be in the hands of a responsible individual who could carefully work with the large numbers of people who were coming into the church.

Many years ago when I began the expansion of the church, the staff organization always followed a perpendicular plan. There was a leader for the Sunday School, and a leader for the other groups in the church. I turned the organizational chart over and made it horizontal, with a leader for the age group responsible for his section Sunday morning, Sunday evening in Training Union, and throughout all the activities of the work. This makes for an excellent program, full-rounded, in every age. Instead of the ministry of the church to a child, a youth, or an adult being chopped up by different leaders who are furthering their own programs, we have one leader over it all for the age who plans the work throughout the days of the week. (Criswell, 1980, p.88)
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<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Activity: Sunday School</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Visitation</th>
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Note: Source: Author
The church has evolved in its structure over the years and continues to do so. Presently the church has eight "sections" of ministry all under the direction of the Pastor and the Executive Director of Ministries. The Cabinet, Directors, support ministries, secretaries and hourly workers all work together for the goals and purposes of the entire First Baptist Church.

The current educational structure can be seen in Table 3, "Concentric Zones of Ministries at First Baptist Church, Dallas." (It should be noted that the Criswell College and the First Baptist Academy are not shown on the chart because both institutions have governing boards which are elected according to their own by-laws. However, one would be naive indeed to believe that Criswell was not the primary supporter and driving force behind both schools.)

As seen in Table 3 the pastor of the church is the autocratic leader of the organization. From him emanates a participative (democratic and consultative) leadership style. It is participative in the sense there is an open invitation to share in the ministry of the church. It is democratic in the sense there are groups that work together within the church on specific projects or assignments each sharing their best ideas. It is consultative in that after the groups have discussed issues at hand the pastor is then consulted in order for him to decide what final action is to be taken. In this scenario only major items of interest are involved. And again, everything is subject to final approval by the Fellowship of Deacons.
Table 3

Concentric Zones of Ministries at the First Baptist Church, Dallas

Note. Source: Author
One by one changes began to slowly occur. In 1945 L.H. Tapscott, former Educational Director, overseeing the Training Union program, resigned to become secretary of the Texas Baptist Brotherhood work. Mrs. J. H. Cassidy who had been the choir director and church organist for over twenty-five years retired.

In the early morning of February 13, 1946, Bob Coleman died, the victim of pneumonia. He was 76 years old. Dr. Criswell and Dr. E. D. Head of Fort Worth conducted the funeral. It was difficult for Criswell because he loved Coleman dearly. But again Truett's own words could be remembered, "God buries the workman, but the work goes on." It seemed as though the final stages of the end of the Truett era and the beginning of the Criswell era were complete.

By 1946 Criswell had been pastor of the church for almost two years and the transition was complete. He had earned the complete confidence of his people. The programs that he had laid out to the deacons had been accepted. He would begin seeking adequate staff to run it on a daily basis. The facilities that would be needed for the church to become a family-centered church would be built in time. The interim days were complete. Criswell was at the helm of his ship. The First Baptist Church faced an open door to the future. Criswell assured his people that the best days for the old downtown church and its congregation were still ahead. The pastor was no longer Dr. Truett's "successor." He was Dr. W. A. Criswell, powerful
preacher and beloved pastor, who enjoyed the unquestionable confidence 
and support of his people.

As with most great individuals there comes a point when the person 
seems to surpass the position they hold or institution they represent. When 
Criswell came to be pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, he was virtually 
unknown. Although he had served in several pastorates, they were in less 
well-known churches. He had held no special position of prominence. 
Criswell himself noted he did not feel he was in the same league with the 
former church pastor, George W. Truett.

It is important to note Criswell's humility in honoring Truett. Criswell 
understood well how people despise a proud, arrogant leader. However, 
people will do almost anything in their power to support and follow a man 
who is a "shepherd," one who leads with a sense of direction, but at the same 
time shows compassion towards people. From the outset of his ministry in 
Dallas, Criswell has used public humility as a means of securing support, 
causing the congregation to want to follow him. For example, in his first 
New Year's message in 1945, he wrote:

In the presence of so much to be done and so great a responsibility, your 
pastor feels like a child. We yield all guidance, all direction, all power, 
all leadership to our heavenly Father! Oh, God, do thou take us by the 
hand and lead us along. Keep us from stumbling and from error. Fill 
our hearts with faith amazing ... and if thou shalt accept us, we shall go 
on forever unafraid. (Criswell, 1944, November, p. 4)

Notice Criswell's use of "we," "our" and "us." He placed himself beside
his people, rather than above them, becoming a fellow pilgrim along life's way. This, in turn, caused the people to honor their young, humble pastor and give him the freedom he would need to lead the church.

In time he learned to function in his new role as the pastor of one of the most prominent churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. Truett’s name had become synonymous with First Baptist Dallas. Now Criswell would face that same challenge. Not only did he rise to the occasion, but in time the roles seemed to switch. No longer was there simply a well-known church with a new pastor, but the pastor became a well-known figure himself. The church began to take on the identity of the pastor. A shift had occurred. Criswell’s involvement in church activities grew to the point he was associated with numerous aspects of Baptist life. W. A. Criswell began to be the institution.
CHAPTER V

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

When W. A. Criswell began to rebuild the First Baptist Church he knew it would include more than a one-day per week program. He wanted a total church program that would keep Christian education and evangelism at the center of the life of the church. Although the purpose of this discussion is not to provide a chronological study of the life of First Baptist Church under Criswell's leadership, it is important to review the first few years of Criswell's tenure as the new pastor to see the philosophy of ministry Criswell introduced to the Church.

Building Programs

Criswell knew his plan would require additional buildings. By 1946, Criswell began to emphasize:

As the carpenter must have his tools to build, so much a church have its tools and equipment if it is to build anything significant. We must have buildings to house our people. We must have more space for our children. We must provide more adequately for our young people. We must obtain more land adjacent to our downtown church for expansion. (McBeth, 1968, p. 234)

Criswell set out to accomplish the task at hand. At every opportunity he stressed the need for expansion. In both Chickasha and Muskogee, one of the first activities Criswell undertook was a building campaign. First Baptist Church, Dallas, would prove to follow the same pattern. "With great
conviction and contagious enthusiasm, Pastor Criswell proclaimed this mandate for the future. The people listened and they believed. Their response made possible one of the greatest eras of advance in the history of the great church" (McBeth, 1968, p. 243).

When Criswell began his building program emphasis the church only owned only two buildings, the sanctuary and the building immediately behind it, known at that time as the educational building. The educational building had originally been built in 1924, but had never been completed on the inside. The building was in a state of repair and renovation during the 1940s. Each floor was gradually being remodeled. When the building was completed, the deacons voted, at the suggestion of Dr. Criswell, to change the name from the educational building to the Truett Building in honor of the former pastor, Dr. George W. Truett. At the same time the large downstairs fellowship hall was named Coleman Hall in honor of Robert Coleman. These facilities are known by these names to the membership of First Baptist Church, Dallas, to this day. These existing facilities, however, still did not suffice for the church program Criswell had in mind.

In May, 1947, the church voted to build an activities building on the corner of Ervay and San Jacinto. This would be the first new building the church had built in over twenty years. Although there was a consensus to build a new structure, many hindrances occurred. There were several changes on the drawing board over what to build. When the foundation was
being dug an underground river was discovered. Building costs had soared over the past quarter century. When ground was finally broken in 1941, the worst delay of all occurred: a shortage of steel due to the Korean War. Restrictions on steel brought a halt to the building. The church members looked at a gigantic hole in the ground which sat empty for months.

It is important to mention these details to understand that the drive and determination behind W. A. Criswell has not been without obstacles. As stated earlier, from childhood he had known adversity. Criswell has become famous not out of "luck" or the turning of fate, but out of dedication and perseverance. Proverbs 24:10 states, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." Criswell refuses to faint, thus demonstrating great strength.

Finally in 1952, eighteen carloads of steel girders were loaded and marked for Dallas. But, due to a railroad strike further delays were encountered. After the strike was settled the steel rolled into Dallas. The building began to be swiftly built. By the end of 1953, it was ready for occupancy. Members were invited to furnish offices, parlors or classrooms. Plaques lined the walls in their names as a memorial to whom they were designated. Most of the money was raised in this manner. A few large donations were made including a $40,000.00 gift by the four daughters of Colonel C. C. Slaughter for whom one of the chapels was named.

The facility was immediately put into full use. Sunday School space was
utilized as well as office space and other endeavors. A tunnel hallway was built under San Jacinto Street to connect the new building with the auditorium basement. In 1959, the church deacons recommended that the beautiful building be known as the Criswell building. The church body approved and the Activities Building became the Criswell Building.

Before the Criswell building could be completed, W. A. Criswell began his next campaign. Criswell saw the need in downtown Dallas for adequate parking facilities, especially on weekdays. Even in the early 1950s, however, land was very expensive in downtown Dallas and the church did not want to go into any further debt.

The Central Christian Church, located on the corner of St. Paul and San Jacinto went up for sale. This facility was right across the street from the First Baptist Church. Criswell wanted that property. He was convinced that God wanted the church to have that location. He knew if a business purchased it and built on it, the location would be lost forever. The asking price of the property was $260,000.00. Criswell was contacted by Mrs. Minnie Slaughter Veal. She donated the money to purchase the building.

In the Centennial History of the First Baptist Church of Dallas (1868-1968), Leon McBeth notes:

This good woman put out over a quarter million dollars without even knowing what the pastor had in mind! That is one of the most remarkable demonstrations of confidence in Criswell in his tenure at First Baptist Church. When Mrs. Veal knew the details of the property's use, she was even more enthusiastic. In fact, she gave a total
of $1,755,500.00 for this building which did not cost the church a penny. If the Criswell Building was the hardest the church ever obtained, the Veal Building was probably the easiest. Not for about a year did the church even know who the donor of this building was, for she wished to remain anonymous. (p. 269)

Now Criswell had the facilities he desired. In addition to the Sanctuary and the educational building, which had recently been remodeled and completed, he now had the Activities Building and a parking building with facilities on top for the youth and recreation program he wanted.

Dedication for the new buildings was held early in 1954. An entire Sunday was devoted to the dedication ceremonies for the new facilities.

Facilities were merely tools to Criswell to implement the multi-faceted programs of the church. To Criswell, programs were simply people in action; people learning, praying, giving, going, playing and worshipping.

Programs through the years gave life and excitement to the Church and helped the people grow.

It is evident that Criswell equates activity and involvement with growth and productivity. In order to get results there must be activity. The more activity, the greater the results. If a little is good, a lot more is better. More can't be done with less, but more can be done with more. Churches don't have a money problem, they have a people problem. Get more people and the money will follow. Missionary William Carey said, "Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God" (Drewery, 1981, p. 88). These thoughts and expressions characterize Criswell's philosophy in
building a great church.

Preaching and Growing

As early as 1946 Criswell had begun a great preaching campaign. He believed in his heart that people were hungry to hear the Word of God taught and in turn the church would grow. Truett had been a topical preacher (preaching on various topics and what the Bible says in relation to those topics). He had never preached through a Bible book verse by verse. Most all preachers in Truett's era were topical preachers.

In Muskogee Criswell had changed his preaching. From the notes given to him from Dr. Hall's library by Hall's widow Criswell began to develop his messages and delivery in a different manner. He had seen the response. In March, 1946, the young pastor began preaching a series entitled, "The Plan of Salvation Through the Ages." His announced goal was to preach through the entire Bible verse by verse, which ultimately took him 18 years!

We are asking the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, to show forth in each book the unveiling of Christ and the redemptive purposes of God. We shall feast upon the Word. Could it be, oh, could it be that God might take these sermons and use them to kindle a fire that shall burn in our hearts until the whole world shall be blessed by the Spirit's presence and power among us? (Criswell, 1946, March)

Criswell set out on his preaching journey believing with all his heart there would be a vigorous response to the verse-by-verse teaching of the Word of God. The crowds began to come and the church began to grow. Criswell used his ingenuity to gather people. To him it seemed people
enjoyed being part of a big cause. Whether building programs or preaching series, people seemed to like being part of a team effort that had a definite goal.

As the adults came to hear Criswell preach they brought their children with them. The Sunday School began to experience phenomenal growth. The Sunday School became the lead organization which set the pace for the entire church program. Criswell remembered his earlier pastoring days at Marlow Baptist Church when he was only 18 years old. The parents came to the church because their children wanted to come. Criswell would forever place a strong emphasis on the youth beginning at the nursery age and going right through the teenage years. He had seen it succeed repeatedly in building the church. It may be true that the youth did not make up one hundred percent of the church family, but they did make up one hundred percent of the church future.

The old staff Criswell inherited could not handle the crowds and new growth the church was experiencing. He began looking for a permanent director of education. As stated previously, Criswell enlisted the help of Dr. W. L. Howse, who taught in the school of Religious Education at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in nearby Fort Worth, Texas. Howse was recognized as one of the nation's leading authorities in Sunday School work at the time. In June of 1946 he began serving on an interim basis as education director of the First Baptist Church, Dallas.
After Bob Coleman died in 1946 the church was without a Sunday School superintendent and a music director (since Coleman had led the singing in the church services as well). One of the new desires of Criswell was to upgrade and modernize the music ministry. In June, 1946, W. H. Souther joined the staff as both minister of music and director of education. Souther came to Dallas from the First Baptist Church of San Antonio. Criswell had high hopes that Souther would take up where Bob Coleman had left off.

Although Souther did a magnificent job with the music, the Sunday School program is where he excelled. As shown previously Criswell wanted to grade the Sunday School program by age divisions. Souther followed through and in time organized on a graded-age group basis the Sunday School program. This made the educational program of the church fit nicely with the overall church direction. From the nursery through the adult areas modern educational methods of instruction and interaction were then employed. The church experienced fantastic growth under the leadership and direction of Mr. Souther. People were coming, the pastor was preaching, buildings were going up, and a spirit of anticipation permeated the air.

Criswell is quick to pour accolades on people. He shares his glory with his co-workers. Years later, in 1967, when Souther was a visiting guest of the church, Criswell referred to Souther as, "the guiding genius of the
Sunday School program as we now know it." Souther had worked at the church for 12 years then went to teach music at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. But the real driving force behind the scenes was W. A. Criswell.

When Criswell came to be the pastor he had required two things: freedom in the pulpit to preach whatever he felt God led him to say (and to appoint a representative to preach in his place during any absence), and control over the staff. Everything in the pulpit was fine. Now it was time to build a staff. Criswell was trying to place the work of the graded program into the hands of capable individuals who would handle the entire responsibility for their age group from beginning to end. It appears from the very start that Criswell had an affinity for female leadership on his staff. Patterson suggests, "...Criswell's inclinations to heed female advice, while at the same time neglecting that of his masculine associates in all likelihood owes its origin to his affinities with his mother" (Patterson, 1986, p. 239). At any rate, Criswell's goal of obtaining a professionally trained staff for each age group began to be a reality and it paid off. Truett's philosophy had been to do most of the work of the church himself. Whereas Truett would do the work of ten people, Criswell hired ten people to do the work, thus freeing himself to build the church.

In 1944 the records indicate that the church grew in membership by a total of 419 people (see Appendix B). By 1952 Criswell had led the
congregation to expand their vision to the point that 892 people joined that year. Now in 1953 with new facilities, several new staff members, and the church growing through the "Preaching Through the Bible Series" it was time for an all out effort to expand. Again, part of the genius of Criswell has been to keep people part of a big "cause." A program of some type must be going on at virtually every moment of which people may feel a part. In 1952 the pastor, Mr. Souther, the graded age group directors and the deacons began planning for an enlargement campaign for 1953. Criswell noted that the project would be in the forefront of the church life for the entire year: "We are to eat, breathe, talk, sleep, walk, drink, dream, and push the Sunday School," (McBeth, 1968, p. 254).

The campaign began in January, 1953 with a three-day leadership conference led by Dr. W. L. Howse and Dr. J. N. Barnette both experts in Sunday School work. But again the real key to the success of the program would prove to be the drive and determination of W. A. Criswell. When Criswell sets his mind to a task he is like a locomotive driving swiftly and powerfully down the tracks. He hates failure more than most men. The late Vince Lombardi, coach of National Football League Champion Green Bay Packers once said, "Winning is not everything. It is the only thing!" (Kramer, 1971, p. 9). This accurately sums up Criswell's position.

Although the youth program was strong and in place, the adult Sunday School program was in need of reorganization. Criswell knew the graded
program was working well with the youth. The directors he had implemented were responsible for every aspect of church life for those in their division. Why wouldn't this work for the adult program as well?

In time the adult program became graded in its emphasis. For a complete listing of the graded program, see Appendix C.

The newer method, the one favored by Criswell and Souther, called for adult classes to be grouped into departments, based on age. This was thought to make for better teaching, and for better organization since it brought the Sunday School into closer relation to the local church program and gave the church the prerogative of electing teachers. This was also the method being recommended strongly by Baptist Sunday School leaders in Nashville. In fact, these Nashville leaders gave great encouragement and help to grading the Dallas school, for such a prominent achievement would help to lead other churches to do the same. (McBeth, 1968, p. 255)

However, there were some classes that did not want to change and their existence is still in place. Criswell called this area of the Sunday School program which was not graded by age the "Bible Division." The emphasis in this area is on the teacher rather than the age of the adult participant.

Some of the outstanding teachers and speakers in the church who lead these classes at the present time include Mrs. W. A. Criswell, nationally known motivational speaker Zig Ziglar, Dr. Paige Patterson, President of the Criswell College, and Psychologist Charles Lowery. For a complete listing of the Bible Division, see Appendix D.

By the end of 1953 the church enrollment had surpassed the 6,000 mark for the first time in the church's history. Total gifts had passed the one
million dollar mark and would never fall below that amount again (see Appendix B). Total additions to the church for the year approached the 1,000 mark. Two new buildings were seeing constant activity and the renovated Truett building was in continual use. All this made W. A. Criswell very happy.

Although Criswell was younger than most all of his deacons he strove for an excellent Board of Deacons who would work closely with him in implementing the financial and functional work of the church. At times he did not get all the cooperation he desired. When that occurred he looked for alternative ideas. Criswell enjoys working with people who are visionary. On more than one occasion this writer has heard Criswell state, "If the deacons had gone along with me our church would now own the entire northwest quadrant of Dallas County."

In December, 1946, Criswell recommended the formation of a "Junior Board" of deacons. These young men in their twenties and thirties would be elected the same way as the older deacons. However they would not be ordained deacons, but simply would function as an activities board to assist the pastor. The action passed overwhelmingly. Thus, in January, 1947, one of the most significant groups in the church came into existence. This group collectively exhibits the servant's heart of the pastor. Their job is to open doors, drive buses, assist the handicapped, help with the Sunday evening offering, lend a helping hand and love and serve the people. "The Junior
Board also brought some of the finest young men into more active service of the church. Understandably, this group came to be a prime recruiting ground for new deacons at First Baptist Church" (McBeth, 1968, p. 261). Thus, one of Criswell's methods for church growth could be clearly seen in the idea of making people feel welcome when they came to church. First Baptist Church was not to be thought of as the "big downtown church," but as the "big friendly church."

Round-Up

In the fall of 1945 Criswell devised a plan for rounding up all the people back together at summer's end and getting them ready to enter the Fall program with much enthusiasm. Naturally this week became known as "Round-Up." The families come down to the church each evening for a ranch-style dinner, activities and a program with a western theme. Criswell loves large crowds in close quarters where people can greet and fellowship with one another. His first invitation to "Round-Up" was, "Come in ranch clothes or come as you are - it's the fun sensation of the century - games, music, eats, fun!" (Criswell, 1946, March, p. 3). Naturally the church responded. The program has expanded and varied over the years from extravaganzas under a big tent on the downtown church property, to out of the city festivities at a dude ranch, to a "First Baptist Only" night at Six Flags Over Texas. Criswell's formula for success in growth can again be seen: activity plus involvement equals growth and productivity. Many churches
throughout the Southern Baptist Convention now have "Round-Up" each fall to bring their people back together after summertime to get off to a good start for the fall season.

Family Camp

In July of 1949, Criswell introduced the church to its first "All-Church Encampment Week." Criswell wanted the families of the church to have a time together to build closer relationships with each other and Jesus Christ through recreation, Bible Study, preaching and time a spent alone with God. In 1948 the church had erected a lodge on land owned by the Dallas Baptist Association known as the Mount Lebanon Assembly. (The lodge is located twenty-one miles south of downtown Dallas on Highway 167 at the Mount Lebanon Baptist Encampment grounds.) It seems Criswell had the church involved in some activity or program at all times. In April of 1949 the new lodge was dedicated. Over the years the camp grounds have evolved primarily into youth facilities for summer camps. However, many adult groups use Mt. Lebanon on the week-ends.

It must be pointed out that there is much more to Criswell's heart than the desire to simply have a lot of activity. He is not interested in a large group of people for just the sake of gathering a crowd. The motive underlying Criswell's methods is an evangelistic spirit. Dr. Criswell has always kept the goal of winning people to Christ at the very center of his ministry. This goal has also always been at the center of the total church
Revival Days

Criswell began spring revival campaigns as soon as he arrived as the new pastor. As early as 1949 tremendous effects were being felt by the church as a result of these revival meetings:

By any measurement this 1949 revival must be counted a success. The closing Sunday service lasted from 9:30 to 1:00 o'clock. Joining the church were 306 people, 130 of them first time converts. Someone joined the church at every service during the month except the third Tuesday night. Eight young persons dedicated their lives to some form of Christian ministry. This was a presage of the future when the First Baptist Church would be a major recruiting ground among Baptist for ministerial students. (McBeth, 1968, p. 244)

In 1950 Criswell was preaching in North Carolina. He went to the home of a young up and coming evangelist by the name of Billy Graham. After a long talk and a meal together Criswell was convinced God's hand was upon the young man. On January 7, 1951, Billy Graham came to the First Baptist Church in Dallas to preach. By 1953 Graham had been thrust into national prominence by the Los Angeles Crusade. When Graham returned to Dallas for a revival in 1953 the Church could not contain the crowds. The meeting had to be moved to the nearby Cotton Bowl. At the end of the week Criswell and the Church in Dallas experienced a wonderful event. Graham, who was attending the Sunday morning service, came forward during the invitation time and placed his membership in the First Baptist Church. Graham wanted to be identified with Criswell and the tremendous evangelistic fervor of the
church. He has remained a member there since July, 1953.

Stewardship

In the fall of every year, right after Round-Up when most all of the people are back in Church, the annual stewardship campaign begins. No program at First Baptist Church receives more detailed planning or more careful promotion than the Stewardship campaign.

Criswell has always been active in the stewardship program, preaching sermons from biblical passages on stewardship and encouraging every person from the oldest to the youngest to participate. However, he refuses to be responsible for the entire program. Most of the details fall into the hands of the Finance Committee and the Divisional Directors. A stewardship theme is adopted and a chairman is elected by the congregation at the Finance Committee's recommendation. Then the process of pledging gifts to the church for the following year begins.

Every person in the church falls into a Sunday School category even if it is the group known as "Church member not enrolled in Sunday School." A Divisional Director (discussed earlier in Table 2) is over each area of the church. Criswell believes people do what is "inspected" rather than what is "expected." He insists that each director personally give each member the opportunity to turn in a pledge card. Over the years the program has varied only slightly.

Many preachers have developed a reputation for preaching about
money too often. It was even the practice of Truett to raise money throughout the year by special appeal for certain projects (foreign missions, home missions, Buckner children's home). Unless there is some type of emergency or special project Criswell rarely "brow beats" people regarding money. His emphasis can be found during the yearly stewardship campaign.

Further Expansion

As time passed it became apparent that even though First Baptist Church was located in an expensive area of town it had to expand. The church was fast becoming the reality of Criswell's dream, namely a family-centered ministry. Enrollment was expanding yearly (see Appendix B). The church began looking for ways to increase their facilities.

Right next door to the sanctuary was located an office building owned by Mr. R. E. Burt. The building was an eleven-story structure with 90,000 square feet of space. Criswell had wanted to church to purchase the building but the price kept it out of range. Finally Mr. Burt had a change of heart and agreed to sell the building for $1,000,000.00 below the appraised market value. His willingness to sell to the First Baptist Church, especially at that price, ranks as one of the most significant property transactions in the history of the church. This also proved the last major building of the church's first century. It should be noted that some people in leadership positions thought the purchase of the Burt Building was a good idea from an investment point of view. The building could be used as a lucrative piece of
rental property and in a few years it would have paid for itself. Criswell's thoughts about that idea were quite pointed, "Our Church is not in the office renting business. We bought the Burt Building to make room for an expanding Sunday School" (McBeth, 1968, p. 283).

At last the church had some room to really expand in a big way. But Criswell, however, never sees a big opportunity as an end in itself. He sees big opportunities as inroads to bigger opportunities. The church could not grow in the Young Married departments and not also grow in the nursery. Criswell believed expansion in one department called for expansion in all departments.

Although Criswell knew the church could not expand further nor go into deeper debt at the time he was simply willing to impart his philosophical views at the time to the people. This is a key concept to grasp. He was not about to quit expanding. The seeds he would plant in the minds of the people would grow in time. When he thought the time was right for the next expansion perhaps they would be ready to go along with their visionary pastor.

The new building also afforded new space for the Juniors and Youth. The Junior Division (made up of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders) and the Youth Division (made up of grades 7 through 12) began to expand rapidly. As time passed the Sunday School program was subdivided into school grade departments. This follows a trend favored by many churches of structuring
Sunday Schools to fit the public school grading system.

Nursery Day School

In 1963 the Nursery Day school opened providing weekday care for children of working mothers. In 1964 the five-year old kindergarten program began. Criswell did not see these programs as an end in themselves. He saw them as opportunities to reach out and make new acquaintances with people in the downtown metroplex. He knew many people's first experiences with a church came about through various means. Perhaps one of these extracurricular activities would afford an opportunity to bring new families into the life of the church.

Pre-Easter Services

Each year the week prior to Easter at the noon lunch hour Criswell brings a series of sermons simply known as the "Pre-Easter Services." For years the meeting took place in downtown Dallas at the Palace Theater. (See Appendix F, Nos. 18, 30, 33, 36.) In later years the meetings moved its location to the Church sanctuary. Business people from all over the downtown community attend the meeting. Lunch is served at the Church before and after the service for a nominal charge. Many of these people experience their first exposure to the downtown First Baptist Church. Also, many of them find their way into the church membership. This is simply another method Criswell uses to reach people for the Lord and the church.
"Spurgeon" Harris Building

As the church began to grow and expand Criswell knew more facilities would become necessary. In 1969 the eleven-story Internal Revenue Service building across the street from the church was purchased. Actually the original transaction was a 99-year lease with a purchase option in the future. This building was a key acquisition; not only was the location important, but this building had several levels for parking. Criswell's keen business mind looks for ways not only to allow the church to grow but also methods of income to help it in the process when appropriate. The parking could be leased out to businesses during the week and used freely by the church members on Sundays. But the deal made Criswell uncomfortable for several years. Although the rent was minimal, he was concerned about the future.

Criswell believes a business or some other type organization may come and go, but the organization of the church will be here forever. Therefore he wanted the church to purchase the property on which the building was located and eliminate the lease. But this building was expensive. The pastor appealed to the congregation for the funds explaining the philosophy that the church would be downtown "forever." As previously noted, Criswell is a master in paying tribute to other people. In this manner Criswell gets other people to join him in the cause at hand thus crowning his efforts with success. Criswell honored the founding pastor of the church, "Spurgeon" Harris, by naming the building in his honor. Criswell recounts the incident:
We stand at the beginning of our greatest and noblest year. This church is indelibly identified with a man named W. W. "Spurgeon" Harris. He was born in 1836 in Russell County, Kentucky. His father was Moses Harris, who moved his little family of a wife and two children to Missouri. Moses Harris, the father, died in Missouri, leaving his widow and the two little boys destitute. An uncle moved the little family to Texas and when that boy was 17 years old W. W. Harris was saved and baptized. He seemingly had a gift of language of speech, and he was licensed to preach when he was 17. When he was 21 years of age a Baptist Association took up a collection for him and sent him to the University called Baylor on the Brazos at Independence. When he was 30 years old he preached a Commencement Sermon at Baylor in 1866 entitled, "The Knowledge of Jesus, the Most Excellent of All Scientists." And because of his eloquence they nicknamed him "Spurgeon." He was the most successful preacher in Texas. He baptized B. H. Carroll, who founded our Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. In 1868 in July, this young preacher came to a frontier village in North Texas called Dallas and he held a two week revival meeting in this frontier village. They had one conversion and at the end of the meeting, they organized a Baptist church—the First Baptist Church of Dallas, with ten coming into the fellowship by letter. There were eleven and he was the first pastor. He never resigned upon a day—he just left, and no one knew where he went; he just left. That's a good way for a preacher to do, I think. Instead of partings, just get up and leave. Don't tell them anything. Just go away! He became an itinerant preacher of the Gospel. When he was 44 years of age in the fall of 1879, he, a lonely horseman, made his journey to South Texas to die in the only family that had ever ultimately befriended him, in the Joe Robert's home. He had no family, no means, no voice, no health, and he died of tuberculosis at the age of 44. He had in his life one of the saddest providences I have ever read about. He was in the Civil War all four years from 1860-1864; and in those four bloody years he constantly corresponded with a young lady school teacher, whom he was to marry after the war was over. When the war was done he came back to Texas to marry that young woman whom he so loved. When he arrived he found that she had suddenly and impulsively married someone else. It was a crushing blow for his life. He never expressed interest in anyone else—in any other woman—and lived alone until his death at 44 years of age in South Texas. He was buried at Fort San Felipe across the River from Del Rio. There was no marker—no place
known—and when I came here to Dallas I told Mr. Tapscott, "I want you to go to South Texas to Del Rio and I want you to find that place and with God's help and grace we're going to build a marker and a monument to 'Spurgeon' Harris, the first pastor of this church and the organizer of this congregation." After L.H. Tapscott tried for endless times and efforts, he finally came back to me and said, "Pastor, there is no way we can identify the grave of 'Spurgeon' Harris. It cannot be found." So he lies in an unmarked grave, the organizer and pastor of this First Baptist Church in Dallas. I resolved to keep his memory alive here in this place by naming the building across the street the "Spurgeon" Harris Building. And I am so grateful that our congregation acquiesced in that appeal. And always I pray that there will be some remembrance of that lonely, pioneer preacher as long as this church shall last . . . till Jesus comes again. (Criswell, 1986, August)

The congregation answered the appeal through the regular giving program of the church. The building became church property.

President of the Southern Baptist Convention

As the years passed Criswell's leadership ability, reputation, and influence began to spread. He preached at state evangelistic conferences all over the Southern and Southwestern states. He was nominated several times to be President of the Southern Baptist Convention, but withdrew his name each time. Finally he had a change of heart. The "strange conviction" was probably related to the fact Criswell began to see a liberal drift occurring in the Southern Baptist Convention:

I deplore, as you would know, any leftward drift in the Convention. And there is no doubt but that it didn't drift to the left, in every way. There's no way it didn't drift to the left. Getting a little more liberal, little more modern, a little more inclined to accept what men thought rather than what God said. All of that. It just was turning that way. So I knew that when I was nominated that it would be bitterly opposed by the men who wanted to see it drift that way and were encouraging it that way. So I felt that my nomination and election, if it came, would
be a decided slowing down of that liberal drift. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 226)

Criswell never left the desire to first and foremost be a pastor. All Southern Baptist Churches are autonomous in their church polity. Therefore, the position of President does not directly affect each local church. The President’s primary responsibility is to make appointments to the various boards and committees. He has no inherent powers nor judicial powers. There are no by-laws, charters or constitutions that give him power over anything on a daily basis. (There are, however, active powers while the convention is in session.) He is merely a man of influence because he has been chosen by his peers as a representative of the denomination.

During the first years of Criswell’s presidency his book was released entitled, *Why I Preach the Bible is Literally True*. There was no confusion as to where Criswell stood. He believes he temporarily turned the movement back to a more conservative position but is still concerned about the direction the convention is headed today. He lays the blame at the feet of the academic community in the seminaries:

Well, I felt that in many, many areas of our denominational life and I hate to say this to you, but I felt it mostly in the academic world—my impression of liberalism and modernism is that it does not come from the people down here who have their dead to bury and their prodigal sons to pray over. Tell a man like that these are parables in the Bible and all that doesn’t help him. It’s got to be a man that believes something to help people like that in the hour of death and trouble. So my impression is that liberalism never arises from the people. It always arises from a professor who sits in some theological chair and he just sits there. He hardly has any contact with the actual pastoral work of
the people. He is in some ivory tower somewhere. He's thinking or philosophizing or something. And so he comes forward with all kinds of ideas and he gets too smart for God. He knows more than God. So he starts spinning out all these things about the Bible, and pretty soon he's accepting this documentary hypothesis and he's teaching Welhausen, Bauer, and all the rest of it. And it isn't long until your young minister has no desire to be a preacher. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, pp. 229-230)

Dr. Criswell's term as President came during difficult days for Southern Baptists. Racial riots were occurring in many of the Southern states. He had been accused of being a segregationist because of a speech he had made to the South Carolina legislature in 1956, advocating segregation. In reality Criswell was not opposed to blacks or any other race coming to the downtown church. He simply believed then, as he does now, that most races would rather worship together because of the commonality of their culture.

During his term in office, Criswell announced an "open door" policy for the First Baptist Church. He preached a sermon entitled, "The Church of the Open Door." The conclusion had been reached earlier by the pastor and the Deacons but was never officially announced. Criswell did not want to appear to be "grandstanding" or preaching the sermon simply to get elected President of the Southern Baptist Convention. So, he waited until the 1968 convention had ended to preach the now famous sermon. In the sermon he stated, "The First Baptist Church is now and forever a Philadelphian church of the open door. Anybody can come and God bless him as he comes" (Criswell, 1968, June).
First Baptist Academy

From the very outset of Criswell's coming to be pastor, he wanted to start a Christian day school, but immediately ran into opposition from several sources. The leadership of the church did not want to have a Christian school, neither did the leadership of the Baptist General Convention of Texas nor the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

Criswell did not see his idea as being part of a Baptist parochial system. He simply wanted the church to have its own school. Criswell has a love for education. He was an excellent student in school and continues to strive for knowledge in academic endeavors. He continued to face opposition. I had one of the biggest denominational leaders in the South tell me, "Criswell, I would hate to see you turn aside from being a preacher to a school teacher." He did not say that as being uncomplimentary to a school teacher. He just thought God called me to be a preacher and that I ought not to be a school teacher.

Another twist of events had occurred which made Criswell want a Christian day school at the church. For many years high school students enrolled in Old Testament and New Testament survey at church received credit towards public school education. This program ended in the late 60s by pressure brought by the Anti-Defamation League of Dallas.

Finally in 1972 an interesting turn of events occurred. Dr. Nolan Estes,
who was with the Federal Bureau of Education in Washington, D.C. was elected Superintendent of the Dallas Public School System. He came to Dallas and joined the First Baptist Church. Criswell saw his opportunity. He met with Dr. Estes and told him what he had been trying to do. Dr. Estes said, "It will be a tragedy if education ever becomes the sole responsibility of the state. If that ever happens totalitarianism and a dictatorship is just around the corner. I will help you. I will help you launch the school"

(Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 212).

At the next Deacons meeting Dr. Estes explained the value of the church school to the deacons body in session. When he finished, the leading deacon who had opposed the school in earlier days stood up and said, "I have opposed this in all these years past but I have changed my mind. I would now like to vote in favor of our establishing the school" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 212).

The school officially began with the beginning of the school year in the fall of 1972 with 125 students. Criswell had struggled for over 35 years trying to get the school off the ground. His dream had now become reality. This situation reveals the tenacity of Criswell. When he sets his mind to a task is almost always accomplished. It may take time, but he does not give up easily.

The First Baptist Academy has expanded rapidly over the years. It now houses two campuses, one downtown for grades K-12, and one in east Dallas
called the "East Campus" for grades K-6. Total enrollment approaches the one thousand mark. Again, it should be emphasized that many of these families who have children in the Academy eventually find their way into the membership of the First Baptist Church through the activities of the school.

Criswell's philosophy of education for the Academy is deeply rooted in the basic fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. It is his desire that a top quality education be provided. However, at the center of this education there is an emphasis on a genuine belief in the Bible. "The story of Noah and the Ark is not a moral tale. It is something that happened in God's providence. Now, that's the way I believe the Bible, and that's the way the school will be taught (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 207).

Criswell would like to see many suburban Christian schools started and sponsored by the downtown church with all of them feeding high school students to the downtown facility. But, Criswell is fast approaching eighty years of age and some of his dreams will ultimately be left to the future leadership.

Because Criswell was so well educated himself and because he has seen the doors of opportunity which have been opened for him due to advanced degrees, he believes a good education is essential. I once heard Criswell tell one of my own daughters the two keys to life were to love Jesus and study hard in school.
Criswell loves to study. He has even mentioned at times that he would have made an "ideal monk." His desire for exactness often causes him to overstate his case. The casual listener probably believes most everything Criswell says because of his impeccable reputation. Yet, Criswell strives to document each point. This characteristic may be seen dating back as far as 1937 in his doctoral dissertation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Criswell's use of footnotes was so extensive he actually apologized for their multiplied use in the Forward of his dissertation: "The footnotes may seem excessive in number, but I have sought to make possible a verification for every conclusion established, and the means by which the conclusion was drawn" (Criswell, 1937, p. v). An excellent example of Criswell's scholarly writing may be seen in Appendix E where Criswell reviews *The Southern Baptist Holy War* written by Joe Edward Barnhart, Professor at the University of North Texas.

Criswell College

Because of Criswell's love for education he wanted to start a Bible Institute for the membership of the church. Criswell thought the Institute would begin with about thirty students. He remembered that Baylor University had started with only about twenty students. To Criswell's amazement the first night over four hundred forty people showed up to register for class! People had come from Oklahoma, South Texas, East Texas, and all around. Professors were enlisted from Southwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary in nearby Fort Worth, Dallas Baptist University and Dallas Theological Seminary. The second semester over five hundred fifty enrolled. The classes met on Sunday and Tuesday evenings. Criswell saw he had provided an answer to an evidently pressing need.

Dr. Leo Eddleman, Baptist scholar and educator, was asked to be President of the Institute, which was fast becoming a school. He immediately set out to have the school work towards accreditation with the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges. Criswell did not see the school forming for competition purposes with other Baptist denominational schools. He just wanted to help people further their education:

> If we had a Bible Institute in West Texas, one in East Texas, one in South Texas, and this one in North Texas, it's help us all a great deal. There are many, many, many preachers who do not go to the seminary for many reasons, but they do not go. And you need a trained laity far more than we now have, and a Bible Institute would help fill that need. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 194)

The dedication of the Criswell Bible Institute took place in January, 1971. The school was dedicated to teaching the entire Bible as the infallible, inerrant Word of God, and to the task of deepening the lives of lay people and vocational Christian leaders. Criswell states he did not particularly like them using his name, but allowed them to in order to identify the school with conservative, evangelical Christianity (Charlton & Spain, 1973, pp.197-198).

In early 1975 Dr. Paige Patterson came to serve as the school's second
President. Dr. Eddleman was getting older and the demand for a younger, energetic man was necessary. Under Patterson's capable leadership the school has made great strides in growth and has developed a reputation as a valid academic institution. The lay institute expanded from simply a night school to a full time day school on the college level. The name of the school was changed to the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies. This umbrella title would oversee the many ministries of the school's operation. The school has become an outstanding training ground for ministerial students and others called of God into religious service.

As the full accredited Bible College and graduate school expanded, offering a variety of degree programs, the Southern Association recommended the school simply be called Criswell College, by which it is now known. The most recent developments have seen the counseling department join with the University of North Texas (formerly North Texas State University) in offering a double masters degree (a degree from each college) for 72 total semester hours of work in the counseling field.

Time has proven Criswell true to his word. The Criswell College is simply another school from which many of the students in the Baptist denomination choose. One does not feel isolated nor is there pressure applied to only attend the Criswell College. The students from First Baptist Church, Dallas, attend a variety of Baptist schools including Baylor University, Hardin-Simmons, Howard Payne, Criswell College, and others.
At the beginning of each school year, all the faculty members of the Criswell College sign the doctrinal statement of faith, thus ensuring the future of the school's theological position. There has been an endowment fund set up to help the school financially every year as long as the mission purpose and biblical beliefs remain true to the founding father's (Criswell) intent, otherwise all financial support from the fund will be cut off.

Criswell had wanted a radio station for the church in the early 1970s. Under Patterson's tenure this dream became a reality. In May, 1976, KCBI-FM signed on the air as the broadcast arm of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies. The listening audience has continued to expand very favorably to the twenty-four hour Christian voice. The station also has a 50,000 watt International Shortwave Station to reach Central Europe and South America. In recent days radio station KCBI-FM (90.9) has expanded to 100,000 watts, placing it in the category with the most powerful stations in the country.

School of the Prophets

Criswell wants his influence to pass on to future generations. This is not because he is desirous of personal glory or fame, but rather out of love for conservative theology and hatred for liberal theology. Therefore, a yearly one week seminar on church dynamics was begun in 1971. This seminar came to be called "The School of the Prophets." Criswell said the school's name went back to the days of Samuel when there were schools of
prophets in ancient Bible times in Israel. In these schools an older, more experienced prophet taught younger men what they knew about the Lord.

Criswell also notes that the biblical phrase "take my yoke upon you," (Matthew 11:29), could better be translated "enroll in my school." Criswell, therefore, believes it is important for other ministers to have full review of the work in Dallas in order to see what has effectively worked. These pastors in turn take many ideas back to their home churches and try to implement them in a way best suited for their own particular situation. Criswell admits that everything done in the Dallas Church will not work exactly in the same way in other churches, but also emphasizes that God will bless a man if he gives himself totally to the Lord and the work of the ministry.

It is during the School of the Prophets that Criswell's ideas and philosophies are most often revealed. This is partially true because of the environment. All these young preachers have traveled to Dallas to hear and see how their "hero" W. A. Criswell planned and accomplished his goals. There is even one session each year called "The Lion's Den" when any question on any topic may be asked. The visiting ministers often ask intriguing questions many of the church members or staff would be fearful to ask. For example, "Who is your choice to be the next pastor of this church?" The visiting ministers will be gone in a few days and are not threatened by the situation. During "The Lion's Den" many church
members visit the special session.

Criswell emphasizes several key points each year during the School of the Prophets. He encourages every man to devote himself each morning to study of the Bible. When Criswell gets up early each morning he usually puts on some old clothes and studies until noon. He notes that he does not have to be fresh of mind to shave, comb his hair or put on his shoes. He believes a lot of preachers waste early morning time putting on their clothes when they could be using their most alert moments of the day for God.

When I began my first pastorate out of the seminary my first full-time church, the deacons said to me in that county seat town, "Now our pastor before you, your predecessor, had his study here at the church. He was a wise man in the 18 years and we think it would be good for you to have your study at the church. Not knowing, I took my little library, the one I had accumulated at that time as a student and I had my study at the church. It didn't take me but one day to find out ... anybody would say, "We're not going to take up his time--we just want to say hello' to him and they would come in and take 30 and 45 minutes telling me hello. That went on all the time. So I gathered myself up and all of my belongings and I took them out to the parsonage and preempted from my wife a bedroom and I made that where my study was. And from that day until this my study is in the place where I live. And I announced to the church as every minister ought to do when you stand in the pulpit the first day that you are the pastor of the congregation ... announce to the people, "My morning is for God. In the afternoon I'll do any work that the church demands. In the evening I'll go to any service, but in the morning I want to be left alone with God. Don't call me ... don't telephone me ... don't come to see me ... don't ask me ... don't look at me. Leave me alone. In the morning I want to be with God. And when you do that and you stand up in the pulpit, the people will know that you have been with the Lord. It will be apparent. It will be the most manifestly publicly publicized thing in all your life. "It is apparent this preacher of ours has been with God." Do that! Do that! (Criswell, 1987, September)
Criswell often talked about the future of the Southern Baptist Denomination at the School of the Prophets. Since he has been one of the leading workers in the Convention and the church a heavy contributor, he has earned the right to be heard. Although optimistic at present, he believes the Convention is headed for trouble. As stated earlier, he has a definite problem with liberal professors in the Baptist universities and seminaries. He notes that every conservative work, whether school or church sooner or later becomes liberal. He often sites Harvard, which was once a conservative theological institution but is now liberal, as an example.

Criswell warns the young preacher to be careful regarding the intimate details of anyone's life. He notes if he listens to every sin a member commits, every time he preachers on that topic the member will think he is talking only to him. The minister should be a friend and a source of hope and encouragement to his people regardless of what they have done. Because of Criswell's 60 years of experience in the pastorate he usually has good answers for the convocation. The typical School of the Prophets has been accurately summarized by Keith:

They listened intently to Criswell devouring every word, like young executives pouring over the stockmarket reports, or doctors at a medical convention hearing of the latest developments in medical science. Excited young men, optimistic, sincere, they were convinced Criswell was a prophet of God and through him they expected to find some of the answers to the perplexing problems facing today's ministers. (1973, p. 173)

Criswell advises the ministers to speak without notes. A man who
preaches without notes must prepare more than one who uses notes, he believes. Although Criswell does not write out his sermons, he does outline them in detail. "I outline my sermons extensively and write a good deal under each point. I have always preached by outline. Do today. I never take the outline into the pulpit, but I have it and follow it in my mind" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 149).

Although Criswell does not manuscript verbatim his sermons, many, many of them are transcribed from cassette tape then adapted for reading. Criswell has had 51 books published. Most have been distributed by major book publishers. Several of his works have made a profound impact on the pulpits and pews of the world. For a complete listing of Criswell's written works, see Appendix F.

Criswell has never lost his love for studying and learning. He has found a variety of ways to communicate his sermons over the years. He presents them in a manner which is exegetical, textual, topical, making a study of the life of a Bible character, or presenting an exposition (verse by verse study) through an entire book of the Bible. The latter has probably become his favorite because if he does not finish his sermon, he can start where he left off the following week.

Yet, Criswell would be the first to admit that the key to ministerial success was not found in simply intellectual pursuits or learned accomplishments. Faith and courage in God should always be the source of
our strength. Criswell often warns the young preacher not to resort to speaking on old news and contemporary subjects of the day, "hashed and rehashed" on the radio and television:

I don’t blame people for not going to those churches and those who go yawn and go to sleep or go play golf the next Sunday. The reason we go to church is to find out: "Does God say anything?" We know what all the economists and other folks say. (Keith, 1973, pp. 162-163)

Criswell always encourages the young preacher to be himself. "You may be a fair imitation of someone else, but listen, you’re the best example of you in this entire world. There’s nobody like you, so be yourself," (Keith, 1973, p. 163).

Praise Service

Perhaps the most important part of the entire church program other than the actual preaching by Criswell occurs at the end of the service. The invitation is extended to come to the Lord or join the church. It is beautifully spoken by Criswell: "And that’s our invitation to you -- Come; from the lower floor, from the balcony round and down these stairwells on either side -- come; a couple, you, a family, you, or just one somebody you, come!" (To Criswell, any response a person makes is a good response. This is because coming down the aisle, to Criswell, is equated to responding to God, and responding to God is always right.) After an invitation has been given and people have responded by coming forward to join the church or make some other decision, Criswell has a "praise service."
The congregation responds well to Criswell during this time. He
laughs, cries, prays, praises, and usually goes on and on over the decision the
person has made. Comments will be made to the individuals which build
them up and immediately make them feel warmly welcomed into the church
family. ("What do you do here in the city?" "Well ... you're going to be
rich!" "My, what a beautiful family." "Thank you for wearing that red
dress ... I love a red dress!" "We love having you here being part of us.
"How precious is this moment before God and his dear people here at First
Baptist Church." "We are going to heaven from here ... and if you're not
here you might miss it!" "You can't get into the kingdom without shaking
my hand!" And many other similar sayings.) Since Criswell has been the
pastor for over forty-three years he is usually acquainted with a relative of
nearly everyone who comes forward. Often he will tell a story or relive an
experience with a family member. Naturally, if the family member is
present they will be publicly called to come forward to stand beside the
person. If it is a child who has made a decision before the Lord, Criswell
will place the child between the parents to emphasize the whole family.
Again it is one of the most special times in the life of the church. Many
believe it has been the key factor in Criswell's success other than his
preaching.

It was mentioned earlier in this paper when Criswell made his public
declaration to be a preacher it was hardly noticed because of the older man
who made the similar decision in the same service. The older man seemed to be given the "spotlight" on that occasion. Even as a child Criswell felt the sting of "unimportance" in his own heart that day. Because of that experience Criswell goes out of his way to welcome children for any and every decision they make for God. Because Criswell believes the New Testament pre-supposes a mature mind (i.e. one can read and understand the scripture) Criswell does not push early childhood conversions nor baptisms. However, he would never, never discourage a child from making a decision for the Lord. Therefore, years ago Criswell devised the scenario known as "a step toward God." This means that although the child may be too young to fully comprehend all the tenets of the Christian faith, he or she may still desire to respond to the love of God. Therefore their decision is publicly recognized by the church. The child experiences love and acceptance by the church and can continue to grow into a more full understanding of the Christian faith as time passes. Criswell has written a small booklet entitled "Joining the Church." It is designed for children to help them in this process (see Appendix G).

Criswell has also developed a plan whereby seminary or Bible college students can join First Baptist Church, Dallas, yet remain on their home church roles in order not to lose their home church mission support. This is called joining by "watchcare." The church will spiritually watch and care for the student while he or she is in the Dallas area. This again reveals the
repercussions in Criswell's own heart as a result of the sensitivity he felt growing up, trying to help anyone who was seeking to do God's work.

The entire service can be summed up by stating Criswell does what he feels compelled to do.

Criswell seems totally uninhibited. He says what he thinks and does what he sees the situation as calling for, whether it is taking a child up in his arms for a visit or verbally scolding his opponents. The fact that a thing "isn't done" bothers him not at all! For example, Dr. Criswell often breaks out singing in the midst of his sermon, singing either a hymn or some popular number to illustrate his message. The people love him for it, although many of them recognize that his enthusiasm exceeds his singing ability! Such things may seem unconventional, but when Criswell does them, somehow they seem the thing to do. (McBeth, 1968, p. 326)

Outreach

Criswell is not afraid to admit his failures and misgivings about other people to his fellow ministers. He uses his failures to encourage others to be careful not to make the same mistake. Criswell has developed a keen sense of compassion for minorities and those in need.

When an unusual situation occurs in the life of W. A. Criswell he often looks beyond the incident for a deeper more profound meaning. Since Criswell believes God is sovereign (in charge of the affairs of life) there are no mistakes or surprises in our lives that God has not previously reviewed. Therefore it is our responsibility to learn and grow in each situation. One morning a man died on the doorstep of the church. That was the beginning of the mission program, to reach people on the downtown streets. Criswell
went before the deacons and asked for money to start three missions (Keith, 1973, p. 166). At the very heart of Criswell's educational contributions is the philosophy to reach out and help people in need. This is why so many local missions have been developed over the years. The mission outreach of the church has grown to include 28 chapels. For a complete listing of the chapels and information regarding the mission work, see Appendix H. Each year a large percentage of the church budget is designated to the mission work.

Criswell is never bothered by the sometimes interruptions the "street people" cause. One Sunday morning during a Church service an intoxicated man came into the service, walked up to the front of the church and began to shout at Criswell. Several men quickly "helped" the man out the door. Criswell stopped, waited patiently until the man left then calmly replied, "That is just one of the many privilege of being the pastor of a downtown church!" The congregation broke out in laughter and applause.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION

Criswell loves being part of a downtown church. Although raised poor and brought up pastoring country churches in his youth, he has found his love in the city. Criswell believes the greatest preacher who ever lived was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon preached in England during the nineteenth century. There are pictures and busts of Spurgeon in Criswell's study at his home. Spurgeon preached in the heart of a large downtown area. It is only fitting that Criswell would want to emulate such a worthy example.

One day on the street I met a wonderful man who has an office in one of those tall buildings that look down upon the city, casting a shadow over our church when the sun rises in the east. He said to me, "I cannot tell you how it affects me when I look out the window of my office and see children on that playground in the heart of the city. It is like nothing I have ever seen in the world." I feel exactly like that fine businessman. How glorious to see children on the church playground gathered in the name of the Lord. It is a wonderful thing that, amid these skyscrapers and within the teeming life of the insurance, banking, merchandising, wholesaling, and the rest of those businesses and companies that contribute to the intense life of the queenly city of Dallas that in its heart, we also have a lighthouse shining for God. (Criswell, 1980, p. 46)

Criswell does not like to think of himself as an influence in denominational life. He is more interested in the life and activity of the
church he so faithfully pastors. This point cannot be overstressed.

Criswell's philosophy of ministry centers around activity and involvement.

Where there is no activity or involvement there is a dead church.

I am so wrapped up in what I am doing—I am preparing a sermon; I am getting a bunch of men going; we're building a building; we're launching a school; we're building an institute; we're having a revival; we're praying for the lost—I am so caught up in what I'm doing that I never think about those other things. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 193)

This scenario is not a private situation with Criswell. He keeps his flock secure by constantly reaffirming to them that they are his first love.

Although the church is large it is extremely warm and friendly, like its pastor.

Though he has prayed with presidents, served as the head of the Southern Baptist Convention and is often recognized in public, Criswell brushes aside the notion that he is a celebrity or even a denominational leader. He insists he is "still a country pastor." "I don't think I am a celebrity," he says. "I just don't. I never think about it. I'm just the pastor of this church, that's all. Nothing more ... I am so consumed in my pastoral work that I don't think of those things." (Jennings, 1985, p. 4E)

Criswell can say whatever he wishes; the fact remains the same. He is the drawing card, the central figure in the life of the church:

These are valid explanations of First Baptist Church growth, but they are all secondary. Actually, one man stands behind this growth—Wallie Amos Criswell. His powerful preaching, his dynamic personality, his unerring leadership, and his public image as a representative of the best of the old time religion makes Criswell a dynamic Dallas figure. The blunt truth is that hundreds of people come to the First Baptist Church to hear Criswell. The attendance declines noticeably when it is known he will be absent. Members have great affection for the man, with
almost unbelievable confidence in his preaching and his judgment about church policies. The pastor has fully justified both their affection and confidence. Because he is sometimes controversial, Criswell probably does not enjoy the universal esteem of the larger Dallas community. However, no man in the history of First Baptist Church has stood taller with his own people. (McBeth, 1968, p. 286)

On Criswell's Fortieth Anniversary as pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, the church gave him a new Mercedes automobile. In addition to many accolades during the day, a moving, gripping slide tape production was presented (see Appendix I). All who saw the presentation noted it depicted the life and ministry of W. A. Criswell in an excellent manner.

Criswell has a fondness for the "dramatic." He not only speaks, he entertains. He uses this to capture his audience to drive a point home much the same way an entertainer does. Criswell knows people are not interested in dull lectures. His audience will stay alert as he speaks.

In 1973 Criswell predicted, "...Within ten years there will be over 25,000 members in the church. On a good Sunday we will have over 10,000 in Sunday School and our yearly budget will go beyond $8,000,000.00 a year" (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 284). Criswell was almost exactly right concerning membership and budget amounts with attendance figures closely following (see Appendix B).

Oddly enough those all around Criswell fear going outside the normal standard accepted way of doing things. They do not like the dramatic. Occasionally a staff member will do something publicly at a service that the church really enjoys. No one enjoys it more than Criswell. But if you are
too unorthodox you could end your own career!

Criswell is conservative in nearly every area of his life. He does not try to associate or cooperate with those of the liberal persuasion because he has found over the years it does not do any good:

To a liberal I am anathema. It's like one of those men at Nashville, Tennessee, one of our denominational executives. He said to me, "Now, don't try to placate the liberals; they're not going to like you no matter what you say or what you do. So you just go on being yourself and let that fall to any level it may descend." Well, I've never forgotten that. I don't try to placate any liberal. He's not going to like me; I don't care what I say or do. So I just don't try it. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 200)

The church facilities have continued to grow over the years. It is not the purpose of this paper to recount the story behind every building program Criswell has achieved. It could be noted, however, that the following buildings were either acquired or built over the years to bring the downtown facility to the place it can now comfortably house over 12,000 people during the morning services: KCBI Building (Reilly Building), 1970; Christian Education Building, 1973; Easterwood Building, 1976 (now sold to Lincoln properties); Ross Avenue Parking Garage, 1980; "Mary C" Building (donated by the late multi-millionaire Mary Crowley, 1983; skywalk access between "Spurgeon" Harris and the Christian Education Building, 1983; the Ruth Ray Hunt Youth Building (donated by multi-millionaire Mrs. H. L. Hunt), 1986.

There is one major goal Criswell still desires for the church. For many
years he has wanted to build a large dining facility where the church family could assemble for meetings and eat together. Coleman Hall, the present facility, has long since lost that kind of capacity. The church has owned a piece of property for some time, which formerly housed Radio Station KCBI-FM and now houses the college Sunday School ministry. The property is on the corner of St. Paul and Old San Jacinto. Nearly twenty years ago in 1968 McBeth wrote in his centennial history work, *The First Baptist Church of Dallas*: "Plans are being tentatively projected to build here a structure to match and connect with the Criswell Building. It will contain kitchens, a dining and fellowship center, and educational space" (pp. 322-323). In his oral memoirs recorded in 1973, Criswell assured Charlton and Spain (p. 283) that the building would soon begin construction:

Spain: And this is then in the final stages of planning it.
Criswell: Yes.
Spain: And will definitely be a reality.
Criswell: Yes. They have a picture of it and everything. It's all ready.

As of this writing the facility has not begun nor are there any plans to do so.

Criswell has often spoken of his hidden fear that the old sanctuary could possibly burn to the ground and while it was being rebuilt the people would have no large facility in which to meet. He believes this in turn could cause a lot of families to begin attending local suburban churches and the downtown church would not survive. Oddly enough there is little talk regarding such a possibility among the congregation. If anything, during such a crisis the
people who have faithfully followed Criswell over the years would no doubt want to rally around their pastor and rise up and build.

Criswell is often frustrated because of his lack of patience in administrative duties. He hates little details which often cause programs and plans to fail in any organization. Therefore he deals with problems on a broad scale rather than in a specific manner.

For example, in April of 1984, Criswell was disgusted with "some" of the staff for their lack of support in their attendance in the worship services of the church. In a letter to each individual staff member he wrote:

It is unthinkable and unimaginable to me that our staff leadership does not attend the services of the church every time the door is open. However other things may be in organizational life, the church service is the heartbeat of everything Christianity is about. The Christian faith can be defined by the word, "church." The church is the body of Christ; it is the breathing organism through which Christ does His work in the earth. All the other organizations of the church would ebb and atrophy overnight were it not for the assembly of the family of God in its preaching--praying--praising--worship services.

Search your own soul. Do you faithfully attend the services of the church? Search your own heart. How long has it been since you came down to the front with a soul you had won to the Lord, or a family you had won to the church? Honestly and truly, I tell you an ugly and harsh fact. It seems to me that out of all the people in the church some of our staff take the smallest and littlest and paltriest interest in it. I am sure that you are there more often than I think, but I tell you another fact. There are some of you that I do not see in attendance in the the church for months at a time.

Let me suggest that you do something. You get to yourself, and you pray through your commitment to Christ and to the work we are trying to do here in the First Baptist Church of Dallas. If you find that your interests are in some other area, let me strongly suggest that you go to that area and work, and leave your place open for us here in the
church to find somebody who will love God enough to attend the services and to try to win people to the Lord.

Through the years I have put up with this worry, no-account, feeble effort on the part of several of our church staff. I have hoped and prayed that God would change our staff, but I have given up that hope. It has come down to the place where it is as simple as this: We are going to have a staff that loves the Lord, serves the Lord, is present upon the services of the Lord, wins people to Christ, comes forward with them at the services of the church; or else, we are going to start all over again with a prayer that God will send us somebody else.

You think this through. You pray this through. And you make the decision what you feel led to do.

Your frustrated, disappointed and heartbroken pastor, W. A. Criswell. (W. A. Criswell, personal communication, April 9, 1984)

The reader will notice in the fourth paragraph of the letter, Criswell refers to only "several of our staff." Yet, each individual staff member received a personal letter addressed to them. Some who had been working hard, attending the meetings and actively involved in the work of the church felt unnecessarily rebuked. The old axiom regarding employer-employee relations is, "Praise publicly, rebuke privately." Criswell's view seems to be "Praise publicly, rebuke publicly." As imperfect as he may be in his administrative skills, he is still in charge.

Over the years, Dr. Criswell has made no secret of the fact he prefers preaching and shepherding the flock to the business and administrative work of the church. Any institution that large, and with that income, requires skillful administration. Not that Criswell is inept--all who know him marvel at his organizational skill. Close observers credit a large part of the church growth since 1944 to his brilliant organizational ability. As an administrator he has the ability to inspire confidence, to know exactly where he is going, and to enlist the hearty cooperation of others. Yet, the pastor finds such mundane details tiring, so the church has wisely enlisted a corps of administrative helpers. When things are going well, the pastor may appear at his office at the church only
rarely, and then not stay for long. His study is at home, and he receives some visitors there. However, the outsider who thinks Criswell has largely withdrawn from the actual running of the church is both right and wrong. He has turned the day-to-day work over to others. But the guiding genius behind the entire massive machinery is still W.A. Criswell, and no one else. (McBeth, 1968, pp. 333-334)

Criswell does not simply cater to those who are intelligent or wealthy. He has a heart filled with compassion for those less fortunate. As early as 1962 a Special Education Department was begun to provide a place of Bible instruction and ministry to children with special needs and learning disabilities. The ministry has continued to grow. It now accommodates both adults and children. Today this ministry is in the capable hands of Miss Libby Reynolds, an employee of the church for over 30 years.

Criswell has kept the fires of activity going strong for over 40 years at the church in Dallas. Activity and involvement have resulted in growth and production. From the outset of his ministry in Dallas, he communicated optimism, enthusiasm and activity. Each and every time there has been a calmness in the work, Criswell is uneasy. He does not like to let up or take, as the Bible refers to it, "an ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1). Everyday is a challenge and an opportunity for growth and expansion. To Criswell, all of that activity is a way of revealing the life and vitality taking place within the church. Without all that activity the church would simply become an historical landmark. He is probably correct. On any given Sunday night a lot of activity and good preaching is taking place at First Baptist Church. While all the other churches in the downtown area are closed, First Baptist is
thriving and growing.

Criswell firmly believes the reason God has blessed him over the years is because he has remained faithful in preaching the Bible. God has not promised to bless every program or activity in which we participate, but He has promised to bless His Word:

There's no such thing as saying, "This part of the Bible is not true," then expecting all the rest of it to be acceptable as true from then on. What happens to you is, when you refuse this part, it's not long until you start refusing this part and then this part and this part and finally it becomes nothing but a piece of antique literature, riddled and decimated, destroyed and shattered by unbelief. You leave it a shambles. The man that doesn't believe in the authenticity of the record in Genesis will not believe in the authenticity of the record in Daniel. Then the man that doesn't believe in Daniel won't believe in Jonah, and the man that doesn't believe in Jonah won't believe the miracles of the New Testament. And the man that doesn't believe in the miracles of the New Testament will not believe in the virgin birth of Christ. The man that doesn't believe in the virgin birth of Christ will come to where he doesn't believe in the bodily resurrection. And it goes on and on and on. The Bible is one book. And if I come to the place where I don't believe parts of it, I eventually come to the place where I look upon it as you would Aesop's Fables. It has moral tales and that's all. Has no authority. (Charlton & Spain, 1973, p. 255)

For W. A. Criswell, that would be unthinkable.

Review and Summary of Criswell's educational philosophy and contributions

1. Truett did the work of ten men. Criswell said he had rather hire ten men to do the work, thus freeing himself to have time to build the church. Criswell instilled the educational philosophy of "recruitment" into the programming of the church. Today every division constantly recruits new
workers, thus expanding their areas of ministry and freeing up the leader to expand the division. In this first contribution it can be seen that Criswell changed the direction of the educational programming of the church by spreading the work out and letting other people help. "Let the pastor take that dedicated group (staff) into his confidence. They will help achieve his every goal and work with him to bring his every dream to realization" (Criswell, 1980, p. 89).

2. Criswell’s view of the First Baptist Church is hardly modest. He believes the church and its ministries are the best in the world. Even though the church is located in downtown Dallas, thus presenting a hardship on some families who must travel many miles, Criswell believes the trip is worth the effort. I have often heard Criswell make the following analogy: "If you or your child were sick, you would not go to just any Doctor. You would find the very best Doctor in town. If you discovered the Doctor’s office was on the other side of town, you would gladly drive the distance because you knew you would be receiving the very best attention possible. Well, that is why we want you to come join our church. We want to give you and your family the best spiritual care possible." This contribution reveals Criswell believe the church ought to achieve excellence in Christian ministry. It is important to strive to be the best in every endeavor for the Lord. In a day when many Christian organizations are faltering it is admirable to see a man and ministry who have been a credit rather than a
"blot" to the cause of Christ.

3. Criswell's educational philosophy has always included putting his personal devotion to the ministry as top priority in his life. He has changed his mind on that issue in recent days. Thus we see his desire to help other ministers learn from his mistakes:

I have a confession to make. All through the years and the years and the years of my life I have placed my ministry first. There has been no exception to that, any day, any night. I have placed my work as a preacher and as a pastor first. A thousand times am I asked in these preacher conferences, "If you have your life to do over again, is there anything you would change?" And I am beginning to reply, "There is. If I had my life to live over again, I would place my family first and my ministry second." This is God's charge, this is God's calling first under His gracious and loving hands to have a Christian home, to rear our children in the love and nurture of the Lord and the other things in life will take their place under the hand and choice, under the supervision and surveillance of the great Almighty God. (Criswell, 1988, May)

4. Criswell believes you should be hard on yourself. If you work hard (which he demands of his staff) life will be easier for you. But if you are easy on yourself, life will be hard on you. Criswell is "harder" on himself than any opponent ever tried to be. He often laments the fact he has not accomplished more in his own lifetime. "If our foresight were as accurate as our hindsight we would all be better off," is an axiom he often quotes.

This probably sounds odd since he has done so much to help shape evangelical Christianity in American today, not to mention the shape of downtown Dallas. (The church now owns six city blocks.) But one must remember Criswell hates failure. He has from childhood. This contribution
may be stated, "Hate failure and work hard to avoid it."

5. Criswell believes each church in time is a reflection of their pastor. "After five years a church becomes like its pastor ... the congregation reflects his persuasions and convictions" (Reavis, 1984, p. 242). Therefore Criswell is strong on leadership. He is a "mover and shaker" and expects his associates to be as well. This attitude has caused the church to grow and accomplish feats most people would consider impossible. After all, how many churches own over $40,000,000.00 of real estate? This contribution is, "Have great vision!" You are only limited by your own limited vision.

6. Criswell has brought about a spirit of excellence to the church. He wants his influence passed on to future generations. He has started a college, grade school, radio station, mission churches and the list goes on. He wants his influence to be felt for years to come; not so much for his sake, but for the sake of conservative evangelical theology. (Criswell will be remembered in church history for many things, but perhaps nothing will have a more long lasting effect than his position on conservative theology. When liberalism abounded, Criswell never moved. Many pastors of the largest churches in America found strength and guidance from Criswell during those times and now emulate him and his theological position.) This attitude has given the church and staff a sense of destiny. The membership feel they are like a "quarterback" on a football team, leading the way for future generations of people. This contribution is: Pass your religious
beliefs on to the next generation. The history of the Christian church will probably not end with you. Plan for the future of the church as well as the present.

7. To Criswell, sternness produces results. At least it did in his life. Dr. Armstrong and Dr. Robertson were stern men. His mother was stern with him about his education, but he sees where it lead him. He had earned a PhD degree when most other preachers had never attended seminary. He was told to study, study, study when he was growing up. He did then. He does now. Fifty-one books, hundreds of articles, thousands of sermons and millions of dollars later Criswell sees the fruits. Contribution: sternness produces results. Therefore, even though he is a gracious man, he can burn holes through you with his eyes. He will praise you publicly, and he will rebuke you publicly. He explodes in anger at times so much so you want to disappear. But one must remember that Criswell keeps short accounts. He will forgive. Learn from your mistakes and go on with life ... just don't do it again! In Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors he states, "Don't reprimand staff or leaders publicly. Do it privately, and then with love and grace" (1980, p. 372). This advice is not always followed.

8. Visitors to First Baptist Church, Dallas, often leave saying, "Even though it is a large church, it is such a friendly church." That is because Criswell's philosophy is to "rave" over people. At Baylor, President Brooks and Dr. Trantham encouraged Criswell greatly by stating their confidence
in him. Criswell learned at a young age what an encouraging word could mean. He encourages people personally and publicly. He makes you feel like you can do just about anything. His encouraging nature has spread throughout the church and has become part of the philosophy used by the staff: Encourage (not manipulate) other people and they will respond.

9. Criswell's formula for success is simple: activity and involvement result in growth and productivity. The catalyst of Criswell's tenure at First Baptist Church, Dallas can be clearly seen in one area, namely, building programs. When at Chickasha and Muskogee it was the same. When people are part of a "big cause" they come together, work hard, sometimes fight, but always grow. Buildings are tangible. They can be seen. Growth can be measured. Criswell likes to measure growth and growth comes by activity and involvement. When nothing is happening then nothing happens!

10. Whenever a big opportunity occurs, Criswell never looks at it as an end in itself. Criswell always sees big opportunities as inroads to bigger opportunity. In October, 1985, the church was beginning its annual stewardship campaign. To some that would appear to be a bad time to have a special offering. "The First Sunday in October (1985) marked forty-one years at First Baptist for Criswell. That day he used the occasion to challenge his congregation to contribute $1,000,000.00. When the offering was tallied, the $1.85 million total was front page news" (Jennings, 1985, p. 4E). This philosophy regarding the programming of the church has been
used successfully many times in many ways. Turn big opportunities into bigger opportunities. When an opportunity for expansion present itself take a leadership role and expand in every area possible.

11. Criswell believes solidly in the educational philosophy which states, "We learn by doing." It matters not that a person does not know how to do a task or job in the church. They can learn. Everybody needs to feel they are part of the group. People learn by having a job or something to do. Involvement in learning produces good results. Even when simply making a public announcement you should do something (sing a song or perform a skit). Just talking does not cause anyone to feel involved in the learning process. Criswell's contribution here would be for every member of the church to be actively involved in a ministry. In this manner they would be present, feel like they are part of the group and learn while they "are doing."

12. The educational staff members are not expected to be "Criswell clones." He wants each person of the staff to "be yourself." His speech teacher taught him years ago, "You are the best you anybody can be." He still believes that. Therefore, the philosophy is to learn what you can from others, understand and find out what needs to be done and do it. Do it right, but be yourself as you do it. Do not be a cheap imitation of someone else. This frees the staff to be creative in many endeavors.

13. The next educational contribution states that Criswell believes one
way to get people to do what you want them to do is to show your feelings. That is, if it is a good situation, outwardly show your excitement and enthusiasm. If it is a bad situation, outwardly show your disappointment. People respond better if they know exactly where you stand and they stand. Criswell gets people to feel like they are part of a team of which he is the coach. He is trying to produce a winning team and wants his people to respond accordingly. He believes if he shows how he feels the people respond better.

14. Criswell has shaped the educational philosophy of the church by paying tribute to other people. Buildings, plazas, chapels, auditoriums, dining rooms, halls are all named in someone's honor or memory. He has tied the current generation with the past and future one. People do not feel they are an "island unto themselves." They are part of history and they too will be remembered in the future. Criswell continues to pay tribute to Truett each year on the anniversary of his death by preaching a sermon in his honor. He refers to him as "the great Truett." Criswell often says, "I am so unworthy to be here. I am just a country preacher. I feel the same way I did 60 years ago when I pastored my first church as a youth." Whoever takes Criswell's place will be wise to remember Criswell. It is a philosophy that has been built into their mindset to honor and remember others!

15. Criswell believes one of the keys to church growth is building the youth departments. If the children want to go to church they must have a
way to get there. The children's programs get much attention, but they are a central part of Criswell's philosophy of building the educational program of the church. Closely related to this philosophy is an emphasis on the Young Married couples department. To Criswell, young married families are the future of the church.

16. As odd as it may seem, Criswell does not believe the church ever has a money problem. To him it is always a "people problem." When people are present they give and support the work of the church. If people get involved in the life and activities of the church, their money will follow. Therefore, the philosophy of educational programming is not, "How much does it cost?" but rather, "Can we get people to come and be part of the program?" Again, the issue is expanding your base of support which is people.

17. Perhaps the greatest educational philosophy Criswell has built into the church is the concept, "You are a winner!" Because Criswell has such a close walk with God he feels a strong sense of the "eternal" as compared to the "temporal." Criswell believes he is a winner, as is every person who is a Christian. Patterson succinctly notes, "One staff member made the sage comment that '...if the whole world were one game of musical chairs with all four billion people involved and only one chair, when the music stopped no one would have to guess who would be in the chair: it would be W.A. Criswell'" (1986, p. 243).
Conclusions

The main factor influencing Criswell has been people. He has always been sensitive to the attitudes and feeling of those close to him. In the "High Profile: Self Portrait" (Jennings, 1985, p.4E) he was asked: "If I could change one thing about myself it would be ..." Criswell answered, "To not let things get to me." Criswell seemingly has a love for everybody, even his opponents. His positive outlook on life make him respected by all.

It appears the factors influencing Criswell most as he grew up were his mother; Dr. George W. Truett, famous pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas; Dr. S. P. Brooks, President of Baylor when Criswell was enrolled as a student; Dr. Armstrong, his English professor and Dr. Tanthram, his Greek professor, both at Baylor; Dr. Robertson and Dr. Davis in graduate school. By the time Criswell received his Doctorate of Philosophy it seems he had decided in his mind to become an influence himself. Other than the influences of the notes from the library of Dr. A.N. Hall, Criswell appears to be swayed little by outside influences as far as his educational programming and pastoring skills are concerned.

The question is often raised, "Who will take the place of W. A. Criswell when he is gone?" The answer is obvious, "Nobody!" No one could ever take the place of Dr. W. A. Criswell. However, just as Criswell never tried to be George W. Truett, someone will become the next pastor who does not seek to be W. A. Criswell, but rather seeks to be God's man for that hour.
APPENDIX A

"Revival for the Soul"

The following is a portion of an article printed in Texas Monthly magazine, October, 1984, written by Dick J. Reavis. The full article was entitled, "The Politics of Armagaddeon."

George W. Truett came to the pulpit he would occupy for forty-seven years in 1897. During his tenure at First Baptist Church, Truett became the most respected preacher in the South, and his church became the Southern Baptist Convention's largest. When he died in 1944, no one thought a pastor could be found who would measure up to him -- though many Baptists today feel the same way about W. A. Criswell, the man who did follow Truett. In conduct and tone, Truett is still the yardstick by which Southern Baptist preachers measure themselves. But not in doctrine.

For almost four decades J. Frank Norris was Truett's chief rival for the soul of Texas Baptistdom. From 1909 to 1952 Norris was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Worth. Eventually his pastorate would surpass Truett's to become the biggest in the Baptist world--though to manage it Norris had to take charge of a second church, in far-off Detroit. He and Truett were as different as the rival cities where they preached. Flamboyant where Truett was dignified, doctrinally strict where Truett was relaxed,
Norris was the father of modern Baptist fundamentalism. While Truett sermonized about bigotry abroad, Norris rampaged about vice at home, earning the nickname of the Texas Tornado. The compassionate Christianity preached by Truett did not inhabit Norris' pulpit. During their lifetimes, Truett was more revered than Norris, but in time Norris would prevail.

Their differences originated with their training. Truett, then a pre-law student, was teaching a Baptist Bible class on Sundays in the tiny North Texas town of Whitewright when his fellow church members voted to draft him into the ministry. Norris decided on the ministry while confined to a wheelchair during adolescence; his mother used his paralysis as an opportunity to teach him the Bible. He had the foresight to see that nonseminarians like Truett were a disappearing breed. After graduating from Baylor he went to seminary at Louisville, Kentucky, where he received his doctorate - a year early - and was class valedictorian.

Truett was not learned in Greek or Hebrew, the languages of the Bible, nor did he regard the Good Book as a hermeneutic problem. In Truett's preaching the Bible was the home base but not the sole province of wide-ranging wisdom. His ministry was not marked by concern for doctrinal questions. Instead, he preached on topics like Christian charity, familial duty, and missionary work. His sermons carried titles like "It Pays to Do Right" and "The Cure for a Troubled Heart." In them he quoted
ecumenically from other preachers, world leaders, scientists, and philosophers, even from those whose religious leanings were less than faithful. "Infidel," the favorite derogative of W. A. Criswell, does not appear in Truett's texts.

But Norris was obsessed with doctrine. He attacked fellow Baptists whose theology he found wanting - starting with George W. Truett. Every Sunday morning Norris sent Truett a telegram, which First Baptist deacons tried to intercept. The text was essentially the same: "How can a man like you presume to occupy a Baptist pulpit?" Norris accused Baylor professors of teaching evolution and praising books that, he asserted, said Mary was a whore and Jesus an illegitimate child. He denounced the multiracial World Baptist Alliance as being under the influence of modernism, referring to the Southern Baptist Convention as a "machine" and a "dictatorship," and charged that Truett was shielding both groups. In 1924 the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the state arm of the SBC, ousted the Tornado, but Norris continued the attack in debates and rump sessions at SBC meetings, where W. A. Criswell heard him speak. Depicting himself as a modern-day Martin Luther, persecuted for defending the Bible, Norris founded a denomination of his own, the Premillennial, Fundamental, Missionary Fellowship, usually called the Fundamentalist Baptist Church.

The differences between Truett and Norris extended to preaching style. Norris punctuated his sermons by flailing his arms, kicking his feet, even
flying his coat on the floor. Truett's voice did all the acrobatics; he did not
move at all. Sunday after Sunday he stood straight-backed behind the pulpit,
as motionless as granite but as moving as the wind. His voice could leap
from a whisper to a shout in the utterance of a syllable. His rate of speech,
normally a conversational 80 words per minute, could accelerate to bursts
of 240. When Truett spoke, his listeners heard the voice of ageless
bereavement, of solemn but overwhelming sorrow.

The whole range of poetic techniques was Truett's, as if it were second
nature. He spoke strings of alliteration - "busy, battered, burdened
humanity," he called us - and could slip into similes "as sincere as sunshine."
He created rhythmic, repetitive lines so much like those of a later Baptist
preacher, Martin Luther King, Jr. "We're bound together in the bundle of
life," Truett preached. "We're bound together in the bundle of life. No man
can live to himself, no man can die to himself. We're bound together in the
bundle of life." Norris' style was more earthy. His shouts were like savage
war whoops; he traded gibes with listeners in the pews; he used such props as
a barrel of apples, which he tossed, one at a time, into the congregation, and
a head-nodding horse that he ushered into church for a baptisimal service.

Truett was best known in Dallas for his Christmas messages, published
as newspaper advertisements. He usually opened the sermonettes by
assessing the condition of humanity in empathetic, nonsectarian terms. His
closing prayers had the ecumenical point of view that Norris scorned as
modernism: "May our consciences be so acutely quickened that we shall feel the sin and shame of selfish war and private greed and whatever alienates life from life, class from class, and nation from nation." Norris made his name by stalking, cornering and vanquishing commercial vice, more vituperatively and more successfully than any Texas preacher before or since. The seminary he founded (now Arlington Baptist College) stands on a site once occupied by a silk-stocking gambling club that was shut down at the Tornado's insistence.

Empathy was Truett's medium. He had no use for money and often told his friends, who vainly tried to teach him different, that it was useful only to ease the burdens of the poor. Beggars painted red arrows on the curbs, pointing the way to his house. None went away empty-handed. So generous was Truett that the church payroll office, in conspiracy with his wife, didn't put his full salary in his hands. The congregation also initiated a tradition that has devolved upon the more prosperous Criswell: individual members bought clothing and other durables as gifts to the pastor.

Norris had no compassion for those who drew his wrath, and they were many. He preached sermons with titles like "Should a Prominent Fort Worth Banker Buy High-Price Silk Hose for Another Man's Wife?" And J. Frank did not shrink from naming names. The wealthy and well-placed were his favorite targets, and his tactics (he was one of the first preachers to advertise his sermons, using radio, newspapers, handbills, and sound trucks)
drew great throngs of working-class people to his church. In 1926 the
Tornado shot a man dead during an argument that, according to his
confidant and biographer, followed a radio sermon in which he had
identified the man as an adulterer. He was acquitted. He was tried for arson
after First Baptist burned to the ground -- and acquitted. When the attorney
who had prosecuted him died in a collision with a streetcar, Norris took a
broken whiskey bottle, filled with what he said was the man's brains, to the
pulpit and preached a sermon entitled, "The Wages of Sin is Death."

Truett's sermons, his bearing, his impeccable decency, earned him a
wide following outside his own denomination and his own city. He became
president of the Southern Baptist Convention and later of the World Baptist
Alliance. He was sought by pulpit committees across the nation and,
according to legend, refused an appeal from John D. Rockefeller to pastor
the tycoon's home church. A Houston newspaper once editorialized that the
only Dallas skyscraper Houston really coveted was George W. Truett.
When the beloved pastor died in 1944, his funeral, attended by eight
thousand people, was described by the Dallas Morning News as the largest in
Texas history.

J. Frank Norris was buried in 1952, accompanied by the wails and tears
of five thousand mourners. He was outspoken to the end. He did not live to
see his theology gain widespread acceptance, but he had scattered seeds that
would sprout in time. He had been the first to champion a young missionary
named John Birch, who had trained at Norris' Fort Worth seminary. After Birch was murdered by Chinese communists in 1945, Norris named a Sunday School building in his honor. Norris' Detroit Sunday school superintendent had founded a fundamentalist seminary that one day would train Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell. And he had seen the pulpit occupied for so many years by his archenemy, George W. Truett, pass to W. A. Criswell. (pp. 165-166, 235)

There is one more incident in this article that must be recounted regarding Norris:

Already Criswell was widely known as the fastest-rising star in the Baptist firmament. His biblical sermons and his church-building also drew the notice of a preacher closer to home. One afternoon in 1952, while working in his church-office study, he glanced out the door that led to a waiting room. A familiar figure was seated there, waiting with great patience. Criswell buzzed his secretary.

"Do you see that old man out there?" he asked. "How long has he been waiting?"

"Well, he's been there for quite a while, Dr. Criswell. He looked like a bum to me, and I wasn't sure you'd want to be disturbed," the secretary told him.

"That man is Frank Norris!" the pastor erupted. Criswell went outside, threw his arms around J. Frank, and invited him into the study.
"My Lord! What brings you here?" he asked.

"Why, I just wanted to now how you are doing," the Tornado told him.

"Oh, we're doing great. We've been blessed, and our work is going ahead wonderfully," the younger preacher said.

"Well, God bless you, that's all I wanted to hear," Norris stammered as he turned to go. He didn't say another word, and soon his words were no more: days later the Tornado died while attending a youth rally in Florida. His visit - or was it a pilgrimage? - to First Baptist was testimony to how much the church had changed since the days when George Truett had trembled as he read J. Frank's Sunday morning telegrams. (p. 242)
## APPENDIX B

First Baptist Church Statistics 1944-1987

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Church Members</th>
<th>Sunday School Enrollment</th>
<th>Additions by Baptism</th>
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APPENDIX C
APPENDIX C

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, DALLAS,
GRADED SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Cradle Roll
A home ministry to First Baptist members who have a new baby until the baby is brought to the Nursery; an outreach ministry to prospect families with a child under 2 years of age; a home ministry to expectant families.

Nursery Division
Children less than three years old

Beginner Division
Four years old to First Grade

Primary Division
First Grade through Third Grade

Junior Division
Fourth Grade through Sixth Grade

Youth Division
Seventh Grade through Eighth Grade (Junior High)
Ninth Grade through Twelfth Grade (Senior High)

College Division
Students enrolled in college

Singles Division
Singles ages 20 and up; divided into smaller groups based on age, some in graduate school

Young Career
Mostly singles ages 20-35; meet in large group

Young Marrieds
Married - age twenty to thirty
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APPENDIX D

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, DALLAS

**Bible Division** - Classes not divided by age; primarily centered around the teacher; no specific curriculum, however, the Bible is always the primary text

Bible Division I  Mrs. "C's" Bible Class - taught by Mrs. W. A. Criswell
Bible Division II Fellowship Class - taught by Doug Brady

Fuller Class - taught by Margaret Fuller
Medical and Dental Class - taught by Dr. Hal Habecker
Pathfinder Class - taught by Dr. Eugene Merrill
Precept Class - taught by June Hunt
Sheafor Class - taught by Dr. Richard Land

Bible Division III Executive Class - taught by Dr. Paige Patterson
President's Class - taught by Dr. Charles Lowery

Bible Division IV Auditorium Class - taught by Zig Ziglar
Joe Edward Barnhart, distinguished professor at North Texas State University is a philosopher who writes with the communicative skills of a novelist. The combination is a salubrious one. Whether or not one agrees with his conclusions, one will find this book to be enjoyable, infuriating, enlightening, confusing, endearing, and irritating—but never dull. The author is no stranger to the Southern Baptist Zion. Dr. Barnhart studied at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Formerly a confessing Christian and Baptist, Dr. Barnhart has obviously spent much time in pursuit of the “facts” in the controversy, which has spanned the last nine years in Southern Baptist life.

Barnhart's casual style, however, does not succeed in disguising a pervasive carelessness in research, which is particularly unworthy of a son of Socrates. Undocumented avowals and lengthy opinions void of
substantive support abound. Even a lofty academe may be justified, in the
writing of prose for a popular market, choosing not to follow the cannons of
accuracy and the demand of documentation normally anticipated in a
technical work. But a plethora of factual errors undermines the credibility
of any author, philosophers included.

For example, Lee Roberson will probably be surprised to learn that he
was never a Southern Baptist (p. 148). Charles Stanley and his children may
be amused to discover that the popular pastor urged his children not to
attend Southern Baptist schools (p. 4). H. L. Hunt became a Christian and
joined the First Baptist Church of Dallas rather late in life and was not a
"member for many years" (p. 217). Barnhart totally misleads the reader
regarding J. L. Dagg, calling him a "racial bigot," and alleging that he spent
much of his life attempting to justify slavery (p. 130). Actually, Dagg wrote
five excellent books. Only in his Moral Science did he make an abortive
attempt to justify slavery, and this attempt occupied a small section of the
monograph. Neither did such discussions occupy much of the time of this
noble pastor and former president of Mercer University. There are
examples of the egregious errors of fact which mar the effort.

Worse still are the apparent misrepresentations of the views and
statements of others. My assistant, Dr. Paige Patterson, is represented as not
desiring to have his money pay the salary of a professor who presents a view
other than his own (p. 98). Aside from the fact that Patterson is
misrepresented, Barnhart fails to explain how it is that views differing markedly from Patterson's own are presented and sometimes even advocated by professors in the Criswell College, over which Patterson presides as President.

My own position is misrepresented by Professor Barnhart when he alleges that, "pressed to the wall, Criswell and his brothers in inerrancy can produce no good reason to deny women ordination except that God does not want them ordained" (p. 152). My theology does, in fact, maintain that an explicit word from God in the Bible is adequate for faith and practice. However, absence of any evidence cited to indicate that this is my view of the ordination of women serves as a stern reminder to the reader that Barnhart has an inappropriate tendency to create positions for others as he goes along, charmed as he apparently is by the illusionary character of his own visions of how things are.

A veneer of scholarship dignifies the treatise with documentation in nine pages of endnotes and an index. The latter is excellent, but the former betrays inadequate research. Assertions of what others believe are often stated with the abandon of a television news commentator. No evidence is cited. Not infrequently some "proponent" is quoted but never identified. For example, "Tillich is a bridge, all right ... He's a bridge that leads the innocent out of the clear air of orthodoxy and into the acid rain of heresy" (p. 133). We must ask, who said this? The answer may be that this book is
not intended to be serious history. It is a Texas Monthly popular mythology. But the preface of The Southern Baptist Holy War seems to suggest a serious attempt to be objective and accurate. In discussion a confrontation involving the lives of nearly fifteen million people, Barnhart should have honored the tested methods of research and reporting that are insisted upon by scholars in the academy.

Finally, the approach which Barnhart makes is somewhat enigmatic. Some chapters seem to treat current circumstances or provide appropriate foundation. Others seem at best tenuously related to the controversy he seeks to chronicle. For example, in a long chapter entitled "Jesus Loves Everybody, Especially Winners," Barnhart discusses subjects such as Baptist and faith-healers. Incorporated into these narratives are such figures as Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, and the neo Pentecostals. Yet never is there indication of exactly how this information assists the reader in understanding the story of the present Southern Baptist controversy. Inordinate space is allotted to some people who are no longer major players. T. C. Smith, once dismissed from the faculty of Southern Seminary, is a case in point. From reading this book one would naturally assume that Dr. Smith has been the major voice of the liberals when, in fact, he has made little impact even during the days of conflict thirty years ago at Southern Seminary.

On the other side, the scintillating style of the book is not its only
virtue. Conservative Southern Baptists will welcome the book for several reasons. First, Dr. Barnhart provides "exhibit A" for legitimacy of their concerns. Presumably, Barnhart believed in God when he entered Southern Seminary. In an enlightening section of chapter three entitled "Thunderstruck At the Seminary," the author describes the shaking of the faith of students arriving for studies in many seminaries. Though he does not say as much, the description has an autobiographical ring. Is it possible that what is here described is the seminary pilgrimage of Joe Edward Barnhart from belief in God to his present agnosticism? In the midst of this, a stunning admission will arrest the reader. "Critics of the seminaries are doubtless correct to charge that much of the biblical criticism taught in the seminary classrooms exacts a heavy toll from these Baptist men and women" (p. 42). Such honesty is refreshing to those of us who have endured a duplicitous Baptist form of "Jesuitical casuistry" on the part of liberals among Southern Baptists.

Furthermore, Dr. Barnhart knows what the real questions are. "Is there a Supreme Intelligence who has designed this vast and complex universe? And if there is, has this Being communicated in some way with mortal humans who occupy a tiny pocket of the universe?" (p. 40). Or again, "If Christians are left to sift through the Bible to separate the credible from the incredible, will the Bible no longer be the Christian's final court of appeals? Will there be any final court of appeal" (p. 35).
In short, misrepresentations notwithstanding, Barnhart understands the seminal questions and the matrix of conservative Southern Baptist thinking far better than most of the moderate or liberal leaders and professors in the denomination. For these reasons every interested Southern Baptist and every conservative evangelical should read this book.

Through the occasionally absurd analogies, non-sequiturs, misrepresentations, and thinly disguised polemics against the faith of conservative evangelicals, one of the author's misunderstandings emerges like Poseidon from the sea. Dr. Barnhart appears to think that good education presents and criticizes all options while advocating none. Yet I doubt that he would wish to accredit a medical school which had such a pedagogical approach. Further, he seems to be oblivious to the fact that like all human authors and instructors, he, too, has an axe to grind -- and he does so very fine!

Should you read this book? Of course. And read about Uncle Remus and Tar Baby, too! Enjoy both! Get all you can from both! Don't take either too seriously!

W. A. Criswell Ph. D.

First Baptist Church, Dallas Texas
APPENDIX F

Annotated Bibliography of the Works of W. A. Criswell*

(In addition to these fifty volumes Criswell has produced numerous articles and booklets which have not been included in this bibliography of major published works.)

   Sixteen sermons trace the theme of "grace" through the Pentateuch as Criswell interprets the Old Testament in light of the New.
   This volume was reprinted by Zondervan in 1960.

   This book was co-authored with Duke K. McCall and took Criswell and McCall to all of the mission fields where Southern Baptists were working at the time.

3. These Issues We Must Face. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953.
   In this series of fourteen messages Criswell addresses relevant controversial issues such as modernism, the virgin birth, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the second coming of Christ.

   These messages on Genesis chapter one set forth the case for
creationism and expose the weaknesses of the evolutionary world view.

   This small tome consists of five messages which follow the theme of the title. Criswell addresses the questions, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" "If a Man Die, Shall He Live Again?" "What Shall I Do Then With Jesus Which is Called Christ?" "What Must I Do to be Saved?" and "How Shall We Escape, If We Neglect So Great Salvation?"

   This volume was a sequel to the Five Great Questions. Once again the pastor selects five passages which are tied by the common theme of "affirmations" as the basis for a sermon series. The five affirmations are: "In the Beginning--God," "Thou Art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," "Christ Died for our Sins," "He Rose Again the Third Day," and "Behold, He Cometh with Clouds."

7. **Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew.** Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961. These nine messages trace the successive development of the theme of "Jesus as Messiah" through the Gospel of Matthew. The subdivision of each message analyzes the sections of the gospel.


In addition to providing eighty-two outstanding expository messages on Revelation these volumes were the first statement in recent time from a premillennial, pretribulation rapture perspective by a Southern Baptist. Beginning in 1969 the five volumes were combined in a one-volume edition.


This little volume was prepared especially for use with those who have lost loved ones. Included in the first section are Scriptures of comfort, followed by a brief message and concluding with poems, all of which have a Scriptural basis.


The importance and value of this book is only eclipsed by his later magnum opus on the subject, entitled
Why I Preach the Bible is Literally True. The Bible for Today's World was the earlier book by Criswell containing ten messages affirming the Bible as the infallible, inerrant Word of God.

   In an era of charismatic confusion regarding the person, nature, and work of the Holy Spirit, this book addresses the basic issues clearly and forthrightly.

   The work is a series of five sermons addressing issues for consideration by those who are opponents of the Christian faith such as the atheist, liberal theologian, communist, materialist, and sinner.

   No other book has elicited the praise and criticism from advocates and opponents of the doctrine of infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture as this book by Criswell. This book was the catalyst for the modern resurgence of conservative doctrine that has held sway in the Southern Baptist Convention in the last decade.

   For fifty years two great preachers, George W. Truett and W.A. Criswell, conducted pre-Easter week noon services at
the Palace Theatre in downtown Dallas. This commemorative work traces the fifty year history of the event and includes two sermons by Truett and ten messages by Criswell preached the week before Easter 1968 and 1969.


This book commemorates Criswell’s term as President of the southern Baptist Convention. In it, he gives his observations on the issues which were of primary concern to churches of the convention. He signaled the call for a return to expository preaching and conservative teaching based on a commitment to the Bible as the infallible, inerrant Word of God.


These four volumes were issues in a one volume edition beginning in 1976. Criswell affirms the historicity of
Daniel and the authenticity of the book which bears
his name. The four volumes contain forty-seven expository
messages that address the controversial issues of Daniel such
as authorship, date, and interpretation. He presents his messages
from a premillennial, pretribulation perspective and also relates
Daniel to Revelation.

On New Year's Eve, 1969, the pastor preached this message
beginning at 7:30 p.m. and continuing until midnight. There
are seven parts to the message which was based on the
theme of redemption through the Bible.

This volume contains the five pre-Easter messages for
the week before Easter, 1972. The contemporary themes
include: "Christ and the State," "Christ and War," "Christ and
Modern Science," "Christ and Communism," and "Christ and
Death."

Excerpts from the 1966 volume The Holy Spirit for Today's World
were compiled into sixteen chapters which address the relevant
issues in the charismatic movement. The reprint of this work
attests its value in addressing the controversy from a solid biblical perspective.

    
The pastor shares twenty-two expository messages preaching through Galatians. The volume was dedicated to the faculty and student body of the newly established Criswell Bible Institute.

    
Here are thirty-six expository messages from Ephesians. The sermons are practical in application and exegetically enlightening for students of the Word.

    
Seventeen expository messages present the relevant passages from James.

    
This is another volume of pre-Easter messages from 1974. Christ is the grand theme of the five messages which present "Christ the Power of God," "... the Gift of God," "... the Word of God," "... the Way of God," and "... the Man of God."

    
The thirteen messages are presented in three parts. Part one
presents the hope of the Second Coming, part two deals with our earthly assignment until His return and part three addresses the matter of endurance until Jesus returns.


This is an additional thirteen messages on the second coming of Jesus which came as a sequel to *What to Do Until Jesus Comes Back*.


These pre-Easter messages from 1975 present the compassion, love, spirit, tears, and blood of Christ.


Here are twenty-seven expository messages which present the various themes addressed in the books of First and Second Peter.


These forty-six messages from Isaiah trace the flow of the gospel through the work of the great prophet. Criswell treats Isaiah in a manner consistent with his stance on the Bible. He considers the whole book to be authentic and handles it with reverence. He affirms the virgin birth in Isa. 7:14, the suffering Savior in Isaiah 53 and the millennial kingdom in Isaiah 65.

This volume is five pre-Easter messages from 1976 focusing on Christ as he faced Calvary.


The chapters in this work are devoted to the atoning work of the blood of Christ. Each chapter was originally a sermon delivered to the congregation of the First Baptist Church, Dallas.


This volume commemorated his fiftieth year of the pastor's preaching ministry. Containing his sixteen favorite messages the volume appeared as the pastor prepared to observe his thirty-fifth year as undershepherd of the First Baptist Church of Dallas.


The comprehensive notes make this one of the finest study Bibles
available. In addition to comments on all major doctrinal passages, the volume deals with problem passages and difficult verses. There are charts that clarify the feasts and offering of Israel, the Seven Churches of Revelation, etc. Each book of the Bible is introduced with a discussion of date, authorship, theme, and special features. There are additional helps in the back including a concordance and maps.


This book was prepared as the doctrinal Bible study for Southern Baptists churches in 1980. Criswell discusses the origin, nature, mission, organization, ordinances, and future of the church.


The pastor devotes twenty-one chapters to the practical wisdom of his fifty-six years as a pastor. He gives practical advice in such areas as pulpit presence, sermon preparation, church finance, church administration, and especially helpful advice on the pastor's personal life.


This daily devotional guide is designed for a year's daily use. This book is a series of vignettes for the days of the year taken from the previous writings of Criswell. An index in the back acknowledges the sources for the messages.


To date, six volumes have been released in this latest series of messages to be placed in print. Criswell preached these messages over a three year period with his goal being to address all the major doctrinal areas of theology. At present, nine volumes have been planned for the series with volume seven addressing prayer and angelology and the last two volumes will be devoted to eschatology.

*(This compilation was done by Dr. Lamar E. Cooper, Sr., Professor at the Criswell College and was used with permission.)*
**This book was inadvertently omitted from the original list compiled by Dr. Cooper. It was added by this writer for clarification and completion.
APPENDIX G
APPENDIX G

Joining the Church, by W.A. Criswell, Pastor, First Baptist Church. This booklet is given to each person who joins the church. It was originally written especially for children.

When I was a little boy and gave my heart to the Lord, I was immediately baptized; but no one said anything to me about the meaning of the holy ordinance. It was only in after years that I learned its true and beautiful significance. I made a resolution when I began my pastoral ministry that every child who came forward to be baptized would be faithfully taught the scriptural meaning of the ordinance. This little book is the fruit of that resolution. May it prove a blessing to every child and to everyone who studies it. (W. A. Criswell)

CHAPTER 1
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED

Without Christ as my Savior I am a condemned sinner (John 3:18). I am utterly lost (John 3:36). As a condemned sinner I am spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). I have no hope and I am without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

For Christ to be a Savior to me I must realize that I am a lost sinner and that He came into the world to save me (Isaiah 53:6; I Timothy 1:15; Matthew 1:21). I am saved forever by repenting of my sins (Luke 13:3) and believing in Jesus as my Savior (John 3:14-16; John 5:24; Acts 20:21; II Timothy 1:12).

When I repent of my sins and ask Jesus to save me, I am immediately and publicly to confess Him as my Savior and Lord (Matthew 10:32,33; Romans 10:9,10).

Questions and Answers

Question: From what does Jesus save?
Answer: From our sins (Mark 2:1-11; Matthew 26:28; I John 1:7).

Question: What is sin?
Answer: Sin is disobedience to God, breaking the law of God (I John 3:4).

Question: Who has sinned?
Answer: All of us have sinned. I have sinned. We all have sinned (Romans 3:10,23).

Question: What is the penalty for my sin?
Answer: Death (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23):

1. Physical Death: The soul is separated from the body.
(2) Spiritual Death: The second death. The soul is separated from God forever.

Question: How can I be saved from this death?

Answer: I can be saved from eternal death by trusting Jesus as my Savior. I am sorry for my sin and turn from it (this is repentance) and look to Jesus to forgive me (this is saving faith). (Acts 16:30, 31.)

Question: Do I work for this great salvation?

Answer: I do not work for my salvation. It is a free gift of God. It is wholly of grace. I just receive it; I just take it; I just accept it. My salvation is something God gives me through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:205; Ephesians 2:8,9).

Question: Why should I seek to do good works?

Answer: Because Jesus has saved me and I seek to honor Him in my life (Ephesians 2:10; James 2:26; John 15:14). If I am truly saved, I will obey my Lord. Good works are the result of my salvation, not the means by which I obtain it. Only after the tree is made good, can it bring forth good fruit (Matthew 12:33).

Question: What are the steps of salvation as we turn in saving faith to Jesus?

Answer: The steps of salvation are:

(1) Repentence: Being sorry for my sin and turning from my sin to Jesus.

(2) Faith: Accepting Jesus as my Savior.
(3) Confession: Publicly declaring my faith in Jesus.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BAPTIZED

The "doctrines" of a church are its beliefs and teachings. The "ordinances" of a church are its observances, called "ordinances" because Christ comanded or "ordered" them. In a New Testament church there are two "ordinances." These two ordinances are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is a burial and a resurrection. We are buried with Christ in the likeness of His death and we are raised with Christ in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:2,3; Colossians 2:12; Galatians 3:27). It shows forth three things:

1. It portrays or pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
2. It portrays or pictures our death to sin and our resurrection to a new life in Christ.
3. It proclaims our faith. Our faith is that if we die and are buried, we shall be raised from the dead by the power of the Lord.

Baptism is the first of the two church ordinances. It is the doorway into the church. We are all baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. The body of Christ is His church. Water baptism portrays that work of the Spirit that adds us to the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13).
Questions and Answers

Question: Who baptized Jesus?
Answer: John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1).

Question: Where was Jesus baptized?
Answer: In the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13). He had to have "Much water" (John 3:23).

Question: Why was Jesus baptized?
Answer: To fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).

Question: What is baptism?
Answer: It is a burial and a resurrection (Colossians 2:12).

Question: What is the meaning of baptism?
Answer: It pictures three things (Romans 6:23; Galatians 3:27):

1. It pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
2. It pictures our death to sin and our resurrection to a new life in Christ.
3. It pictures our faith that if we die and are buried we shall also be raised from the dead.

Question: Does Jesus command us to be baptized?
Answer: Yes. According to His Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, all are to be baptized who accept Jesus as their Savior.

Question: In what name are we commanded to be baptized?
Answer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
(Matthew 28:19).

Question: In Acts 8:26-39, what was the first thing the eunuch wanted to do after he heard the gospel of Jesus?

Answer: He wanted to be baptized (Acts 8:36).

Question: What was the one requirement he had to meet before he could be baptized?

Answer: To believe in Jesus with all his heart (Acts 8:37).

Question: How was the eunuch baptized?

Answer: He was lowered beneath the baptisimal waters (buried with Christ) and he was raised out of the baptisimal waters (resurrected with Christ). (Acts 8:38,39.)

Question: According to Acts 2:41; 10:44-48, who should be baptized?

Answer: Those who have repented of their sins and have accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Question: Are we lost if we are not baptized?

Answer: The Bible says we are lost if we do not repent (Luke 13:3). The Bible says we are lost if we fail to believe on Jesus (John 3:18). Nowhere does the Bible say we are lost if we are not baptized.

Question: Why then should we be baptized?

Answer: Because of our love for the Savior. Jesus Himself set the example and Jesus Himself commanded us to be baptized. Baptism is an act of obedience on the part of one who believe in Jesus.
Question: How is baptism rightly administered?

Answer: The believer is immersed in water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is according to the institution of Christ and the practice of the Lord's Apostles.

CHAPTER 3
WHAT IT MEANS TO TAKE THE LORD'S SUPPER

The second (and recurring) church ordinance is the Lord's Supper. It was instituted by our Savior the night in which He was betrayed and delivered to die for our sins on the cross (Matthew 26:20-30). We are not saved by partaking of the Supper. It is a memorial of the death of Christ, that we may ever remember His sacrifice for us (I Corinthians 10:16).

Who may take the Lord's Supper? Those who have trusted Jesus as their Savior and who have been baptized in obedience to His command. In the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:19,30, three things are very plain: first, we are to make disciples (the literal translation) of all nations; second, we are to baptize these converts in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; third, we are to teach converts to observe the things Jesus has commanded us, one of those things commanded being the observance of the Lord's Supper. The order Jesus gave is very plain. It is one, two, three. One, we must trust Jesus, become a disciple of Jesus. Two, we are to be baptized, "buried with the Lord, raised with the Lord." Three,
we are to observe the things Christ has given us to keep, one of which is the Lord's Supper.

This order of one, two, three is as much inspired as the content of the Great Commission. Before I have the privilege of taking the Lord's Supper I must (first) be converted, I must (second) be baptized, then I am ready (third) to sit at the Lord's table.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Read I Corinthians 11:23-29

Question: What are the two elements of the Lord's Supper?

Answer: Bread and "the fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29) the red juice of crushed grapes held in a cup.

Question: What do these two elements symbolize?

Answer: The bread represents the body of Christ and the cup represents the blood of Christ.

Question: Why are these two elements not the actual body and blood of Jesus?

Answer: Because when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and said these words. His body was standing before the disciples and His blood was still coursing through His veins. The bread and the cup "show forth the Lord's death." The very words "in remembrance of me" suggest their symbolic nature. Jesus said He was "the door" (John
(John 1:10), "the vine" (John 15:1), "the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11), and we understand perfectly what He meant. We understand also the symbolic meaning of His words regarding the bread and the cup.

Question: How often should we observe memorial of the Lord's Supper?
Answer: Jesus left to that to us. He said, "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ..." We could observe the Lord's Supper every day, every week, every month, every quarter.

Question: How should we take the Lord's Supper?
Answer: We should take the Lord's Supper in deepest humility and reverence.

The adverb "unworthily" (notice it is not an adjective) in I Corinthians 11:27-29 refers to our manner of observing the ordinance, not our own worth. Because we are sinners and the sacrifice of Christ has made atonement for our sins, we observe the Lord's Supper in overflowing love and gratitude.

Question: What is meant by the words in I Corinthians 11:26, "till he come?"
Answer: The words "till he come" plainly teach us that our Lord Jesus will come a second time, which is the joy and hope of all those who truly believe in Jesus (Acts 1:11; I Thessalonians 4:16).
CHAPTER 5
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GOOD CHURCH MEMBER

A church is not the building in which the people meet. A church is a congregation of baptized believers voluntarily associated together for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel, observing the ordinances, and fellowshipping in the love and grace of the Lord Jesus. Jesus founded the church (Matthew 16:18) and so loved it that he gave Himself for it (Acts 20:28, Ephesians 5:25).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: As a church member should I attend the services of the church?
Answer: According to Hebrews 10:25, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" I must faithfully attend the services of the church.

Question: As a church member should I witness for Jesus?
Answer: According to Luke 24:45-48, Acts 1:8, we are to witness to the saving grace of Jesus to everyone everywhere.

Question: As a church member should I read my Bible and pray every day?

Question: Does God have a plan for me to support the church?
Answer: According to I Corinthians 16:1,2, I am every first day of the week (Sunday) to give to God a proportionate part of my income. The people of God under the law gave at least a tenth (Leviticus 27:30-33). Those who love Jesus will give even more. It is a holy privilege to give (II Corinthians 8:9, II Corinthians 9:6,7).

BENEDICTION

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 24,25).
APPENDIX H

MISSIONS OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, DALLAS

Arab Chapel (Arab)
Calvary Chapel (Spanish)
Cambodian
El Buen Pastor (Spanish)
Good Shepherd (Tri-ethnic)
Happy Hill Farm
Inner City Chapel (Street people)
Laotian Chapel
Leland Street Chapel (Black)
Loving Missionary (Black)
Meadow Gardens (Tri-ethnic)
Outreach Baptist Chapel
Orchard Road Lewisville
Silent Friends (Deaf)
Skyline
Truett Chapel (Tri-ethnic)
Mt. Zion Baptist #3 (Black)
New Mt. Gilead (Black)
4th Floor, Criswell Bldg.
5227 Nomas, Dallas
Virginia & Grigsby
1118 N. Carroll
842 Hillburn Dr., Dallas
Star Rt: Hwy 144 (Glen Rose)
2515 Ross Avenue
3125 Peoria
4609 Leland, Dallas
4002 S. Denley Drive, Dallas
2902 McGowan
1780 E. Northwest Hwy. Garland
1244 Kingston, Lewisville
Ralph Baker Hall, FBC
3011 Cypress Drive, Dallas
3125 Peoria, Dallas
515 Long Branch
1012 Bayonne, Dallas
Brazilian Chapel (Portuguese) 3rd Floor, Criswell Bldg.
Juvenile Ministry Hutchins, Texas
Youth Village Harry Hines
Harry Hines Detention Ctr. Military & Buckner
Dallas House Gainesville, Texas
Gainesville TDC 811 S. Akard
Rehab Center

Prison

State prisons visited by David
Umfreville on weekends

500 Commerce

Lew Sterrett Center on Oaklawn

Jail

4th floor Criswell Bldg.

*Chinese Chapel

4th floor Criswell Bldg.

*Japanese Chapel

*These two chapels are more autonomous and do not work directly under 
the office of Outreach Ministries except in benevolence. The Pastor does 
refer to them when counting the number of our chapels.
APPENDIX I

"God's Servant, The Forty Years That Began With Prayer"

(The following information was transcribed from the slide/tape production which was presented in honor of Dr. W. A. Criswell's fortieth anniversary as Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas. The events of that day were video taped and are available through the Media Ministry of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas.)

It is morning. The air has that special crystal clarity one feels on the Lord's day. The streets are still. The grey fears of night have fled. The sun grows warm. Soon there will be music from the church ... over there ... tough old temple standing among fragile towers. For forty years now, on mornings such as this, we have come to hear the Word, voice of the warm hymn, message from the heart of God to the hearts of men. What would He have us know this day of love and joy, duty and redemption? For forty years now, we have come to the old stone church to drink at the fountain of the Lord; and for forty years now, it has been this man who has held the cup. (Criswell preaching in the background.)

"... that we build a fence around the cemetery, and that same guy got up. He said, 'I'm agin' it. I'm agin'it.' He said, 'Do you
know anybody in that cemetery that can get out?"

"If there is a preacher who departs from the faith,
God sees to it that there is another preacher raised up."

"It is the man. It is the man Christ Jesus. It is He that
saves us and it is he that keeps us saved."

Preacher, pastor, Shepherd, God's servant ... For forty years now, he
has nourished our faith, lifted out hearts when they were heavy, touched out
children with the song of his spirit. He has fought our most difficult battles
and has built our church where it is impossible for a church to be.
He has reached out for those among us who are hungry or lost or afraid. He
has carved a clean and clear direction for our lies in an age of cruel and
confusing ambiguity. We know him as preacher, pastor, shepherd.

But then, sometimes we wonder. Do we really know him at all ... the man behind the message? Is it even possible that we can know the private
person within the public pulpiteer? Isn't he a man, flesh and blood as we
are, subject to the same pain and pleasure which chase each other through
our lives? Doesn't the shepherd sometimes fear the wolf, dread the coming
of the night? Who is this man that came among us that day so long ago?
Remember? He seemed so young. The hands that held the Bible shook. He
said there were dozens more qualified than he; but here he was - the
unknown man from Muskoge, rock-jawed, eyes on fire - yet warm
somehow, even vulnerable - if a tree of a man can be vulnerable. Was he
afraid following the footsteps of the most beloved minister in Christendom,
in this world’s greatest Baptist church? His text that day was this: "For
there stood beside me an angel of God saying, 'Fear not.'” And when his
sermon was done, he dropped to his knees before us all and in this position
of humility before God and man prayed for guidance.

But what do we know of this complex man after all these years we’ve
shared? We know he seems to be a tapestry of contradictions. In the pulpit,
he is lightning and thunder; yet out of the pulpit, he is uncommonly shy,
beautifully gentle. He has a brilliant mind, is a sophisticated scholar; yet he
never allows his scholarship to intrude on the simple truth of his message.
He preaches the gospel unadorned. He has enormous dignity, yet will be a
clown for a child. He is always surrounded by people, but is somehow
uniquely, always alone. He is a friend to all, yet allows himself no close
friends. He is a rock, yet he weeps before us all. He is elegant and cultured,
yet crumbles cornbread in his milk. He works out at the YMCA every day;
yet when invited to play golf, he prays for rain. He is courted by many, yet
is his own man and does not belong to anyone but God. We know all this,
but then, do we really know him at all?

We are, without exception, children of the earth; the land, a crucible of
our philosophy. Far out in West Texas there is a place empty as a vagabond’s pocket, wide as the horizons of the mind. The boy would have felt the power of this place, its sense of absolutes, its overpowering heat in summer, the howling blizzards in winter. The sun that falls on the town of Texline casts hard shadows. One rarely finds shades of grey. It was the kind of lonesome land the prophets wandered in another time - both beautiful and incredibly hard. On a small dirt farm near Texline, the boy sat down one day to read the Bible through, from Genesis to Revelation. He also filled the boredom of long summer days by reading the books of western tales, the gospel according to Zane Grey, good and evil locked in combat always won by good. In the Bible, there were bewildering secrets to be unlocked, a code to live by. The West of Zane Grey has its own code.

Once there was a revival meeting in Texline. The people gathered to warm themselves on the fire of their faith. The boy watched and felt the fire and learned the power of the Word to change the hearts of men and woman. He knew then what God wanted with his life. He would speak a mosaic of words woven with the power of the word.

"And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and did let none of his words fall to the ground." Now the boy, as a man, is pastor of the largest Baptist church in the world, a preacher of unparalleled power, a denominational leader of unquestioned influence, a shepherd to a flock of twenty-four thousand souls, responsible for a church spreading over six city
blocks filled with the music of twenty choirs, where seven thousand people will attend Sunday School each Sunday, and there will be one thousand baptisms each year. It is a staggering load he carries, yet he shoulders it gladly, with dignity and grace. The day is short, the task so very hard; and he is but a man, flesh and blood as we are. For forty years his sermons have been filled with light; but he is only a man; and in the far corners of the corridors of his mind, there must have sometimes been the darkness of doubt.

The young man in college was pulled two ways. One the one hand, his intellectual curiosity led him inward. He devoured the great philosophies of the ages from St. Augustine to Immanuel Kant. "What is the nature of nature? of man? of God? How could it be that so many gifted thinkers have turned away from Christ? Is it possible I've been blinded by the light?" On the other hand, God led him out of the privacy of himself. For the first time the young man saw the world of unfathomable pain and hunger. He preached in the jails, the streets, the poor house. Here was reality. Here was human need. What does it matter how many angels can fit on the head of a pin when my brother is bleeding and lost. There was no time for doubt - too much to be done. In later years, as a man, he would say this about doubt, "It is a question with which I still wrestle. 'Where is God?' I see the indescribable horror and suffering of war. How does God bear to look upon it? There are inscrutable mysteries into which I cannot enter," the Pastor
said, "but I am confident of the infinite mercy and goodness of God, and there I stand ... I take it by faith." Now he carries his faith out into the city and into the world. His Bible and his bread, his compassion and his Savior, weapons against the problem of evil and the problem of sin and the problem of human need.

Consider God's servant, the preacher, the pastor, the shepherd. For forty years he has preached from that pulpit a timeless truth which can and will never change. God's truth is unalterable -- Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. It would seem then, that the preacher of that truth would possess a view of the world which would also be unchanged through the years; but on matters of conscience, few men have made the journey the pastor has made; and in this fact resides his greatest humanity. Years ago his love for his country and his fear of freedom's loss demanded that he step from behind the pulpit and do battle in the secular arena. He fought radicals, atheists, self-serving politicians, runaway liberalism, cowards of all kinds, trendy social patterns and anyone who would erode the freedoms of action and conscience he so deeply cherished. Then in time, he began to feel his heart changing on one of the more critical issues of his time. No longer did he believe there could be a separation of the races in the Body of Christ. He insisted that the First Baptist Church be a Philadelphian church of the open door. The mind of God is eternal. The heart of man can change.
Another glorious Sunday has said its final "Amen;" and though the old stone church is silent, the memory of hymns sung sweetly hangs in the air. On Swiss Avenue, the preacher, the pastor, the shepherd returns once more to his endless search for answers to inscrutable mysteries; and we wonder, "Who is this man?" We must know. Isn't it necessary that we know so we can express the love we feel, so we can tell him how much he means to our lives? Here is an irony. The fact that he is a giant, that he has accomplished heroic deeds, that he has lived so very close to God sometimes seems to create a distance between us -- not of his choosing, nor of ours; but when we reach across that tender distance, now, on this fortieth year he has touched out lives, we build a bridge past pastor, past preacher, past shepherd to the very heart of the man and find there the warmth, the love, and the kinship of a sweet friend and fellow pilgrim: and to him we say, "You are loved. We proudly salute you W. A. Criswell, our beloved pastor and truly, truly God's Beloved Servant."
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