

ADDRESS FROM THE CHAIR
HOUSE OF DEPUTIES
July 11, 1991

Welcome to all the Deputies to the 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Welcome, also, to all alternates who are present, our guests in the gallery, the volunteers and members of the press. As we gather at this time, your President is mindful that this is the Convention at which he will not only say, Welcome, but also, he will say, Farewell. Not knowing how to do both at the same time, I will say farewell at the end of this Convention. I am reserving part of my address from the Chair for the closing session, and that let's me say, with undistracted heart and mind, welcome, brothers and sisters to you all.

Una bien(v)enida muy especial al nuestros hermanos y hermanas del mundo hispano.

Demos gracias al Señor por los talentos muy especiales, que Ustedes comparten con nosotros en esta Cámara de Diputados.

Welcome all and welcome once again.

Let me speak a word about those who constitute this House of Deputies. I am informed that there are a total of 854 Deputies, and to our surprise, we believe that only 274 of those are here for the first time as elected deputies. 218 are here for the second time. 521 or 61% are appointed to committees, and I believe this is the largest number of deputies appointed to serve on committees in any convention.

Let me reminisce a little. Clearly my most memorable convention was the one of 15 years ago, held in Minnesota in 1976. As nearly as I can count and recognize them, only about 35 or 40 of those of us who were there in 1976 as deputies are still in the House of Deputies. Still others, who were there in other roles, are now serving on the floor of this House. As they say, time marches on.

Let me say a special word of tribute to our senior deputies, our elders in the House. There are two deputies for whom this is their 13th General Convention; they are Sheldon Crocker of Texas, 13 consecutive conventions as a deputy, and the Honorable Hugh R. Jones of Central New York, who has now 13 conventions but missed a few in between.

Charles Crump of West Tennessee is attending his 12th, and Robert Gaines of Northern California is attending his 11th. This is my tenth, and our Chaplain, Kermit Lloyd is attending his 9th.

Longevity is fine and necessary, for we need our guardians and elders. But I hope they will forgive me if I recall the saying of the long time trainer of Sewanee football teams, affectionately known as Willie Six. When asked his favorite team, he always replied, it is the one that's comin' up. All of you newer deputies and those who will come after you are the really important ones, the ones a comin' up.

It is to those a comin' up, as well as to all of us, that I want to say a serious word -- and my word to you is this -- uphold, with all your strength, the independence and integrity of the House of Deputies.

Please hear me accurately. This is not a word of condemnation or of blame. There is no evil conspiracy to take away our integrity. It is not as simple as that.

I have consistently lifted my voice to urge the strongest kind of cognate relationship between the two Houses, and that was mirrored in my own committee work in 1976. But it was John Coburn, the best President of the House in my memory, that called attention to the fact that in an age in which lay ministry is being put forward as never before, in which the collegial nature of the Church is more and more being stressed, it is strange that the one clear area in the life of our National Church in which ordinary priests and laypeople may take their proper part in the governance of this Church -- namely, the House of Deputies, is somehow more and more weakened in its influence, its position, and the chance to exercise its appropriate power. Once every three years we come into being, and then, except for the State of the Church committees, we dissolve into thin air for three more years, and with that dissolving, goes much of the influence and even the memory of this House.

I say this to you now, because it is obvious I am not speaking about more power for myself. This is the last Convention for me. I say this to you now, so that you will be alert to the present pressures, however benign and however unintentional, that would seek to erode your rights, the use of your gifts, and your proper place in the life of our National Church.

Some committees of this body, such as the State of the Church Committee, or some interim body such as the Standing Commission on the Structure of the Church, may wish to look back to John Coburn's prophetic words and judge whether or not I am speaking a timely truth to you. Remember, this is not condemnation, but a call to look at the changing realities of our Church's life, and the role of all of the orders of the Ministers of the Church. Let us stand together with those in the Episcopal order, together making our united and common and balanced contribution in the governance and decision making of the Church.

We have many more issues, and many emotional ones, that will come before us, important ones, dealing with the heart of our faith and life. I plead that we may debate them honestly, clearly, even passionately, but without condemning or impugning the motives of those who disagree with us. To speak the truth in love, with consideration and respect for the persons of those who are our opponents, not enemies, opponents... that is our real job.

Let us speak with conviction but also with humility. One of my most important jobs as President, along with the Secretary of the House, is to supervise the placing of this Bible. Rule 1 requires that "following the example of primitive Councils, a copy of the Holy Scriptures shall always be reverently placed in view at the meetings of the House." (Const. and Canons, p. 153). If you are curious, it is opened to Proverbs, the third chapter and verses five and six -- "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all they ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

We come together, here in this House, for really only a short time, even the most senior of us, to testify to the truth as God has given us to see the truth. Our hope and our confidence is not in ourselves, for we see as in a mirror, dimly. We know in part and we prophecy in part. But God's truth, God's unchangeable truth, endures forever.

The Seventh Lambeth Conference opened on July 6, 1930, just sixty-one years ago. Randall Davidson was to have preached, but he had died just a few months before, and Archbishop William Temple took his place. Archbishop Temple preached a memorable sermon on the Majesty of God, which ended as I would like to end this address, on a note, says his biographer, on a note of triumphant assurance. Let me paraphrase Temple's ending of his sermon:

"While we deliberate, (God) reigns; when we decide wisely, (God) reigns; when we decide foolishly (God) reigns; when we serve Him in humble loyalty, (God) reigns; When we rebel and seek to withhold our service, (God) reigns -- The Alpha and the Omega, which is and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."¹

Amen and amen, and thank you.

¹William Temple's Biography, p. 459