

SOUTHEASTERN

NEWS

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GOSPEL HARD TO PREACH IN AMERICA, VETERAN PASTOR SAYS

Wake Forest, N. C. - Preaching the Gospel in America today may be an "impossible possibility," W. W. Finlator told the Spring Convocation audience at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

It may be a task, he said, for which students are not prepared, which their congregations might not accept, and which cuts across the grain of current American pride.

Finlator, pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. from 1956 to his retirement in 1982, shocked his audience with two statements which he called "incredible, preposterous, and even infuriating."

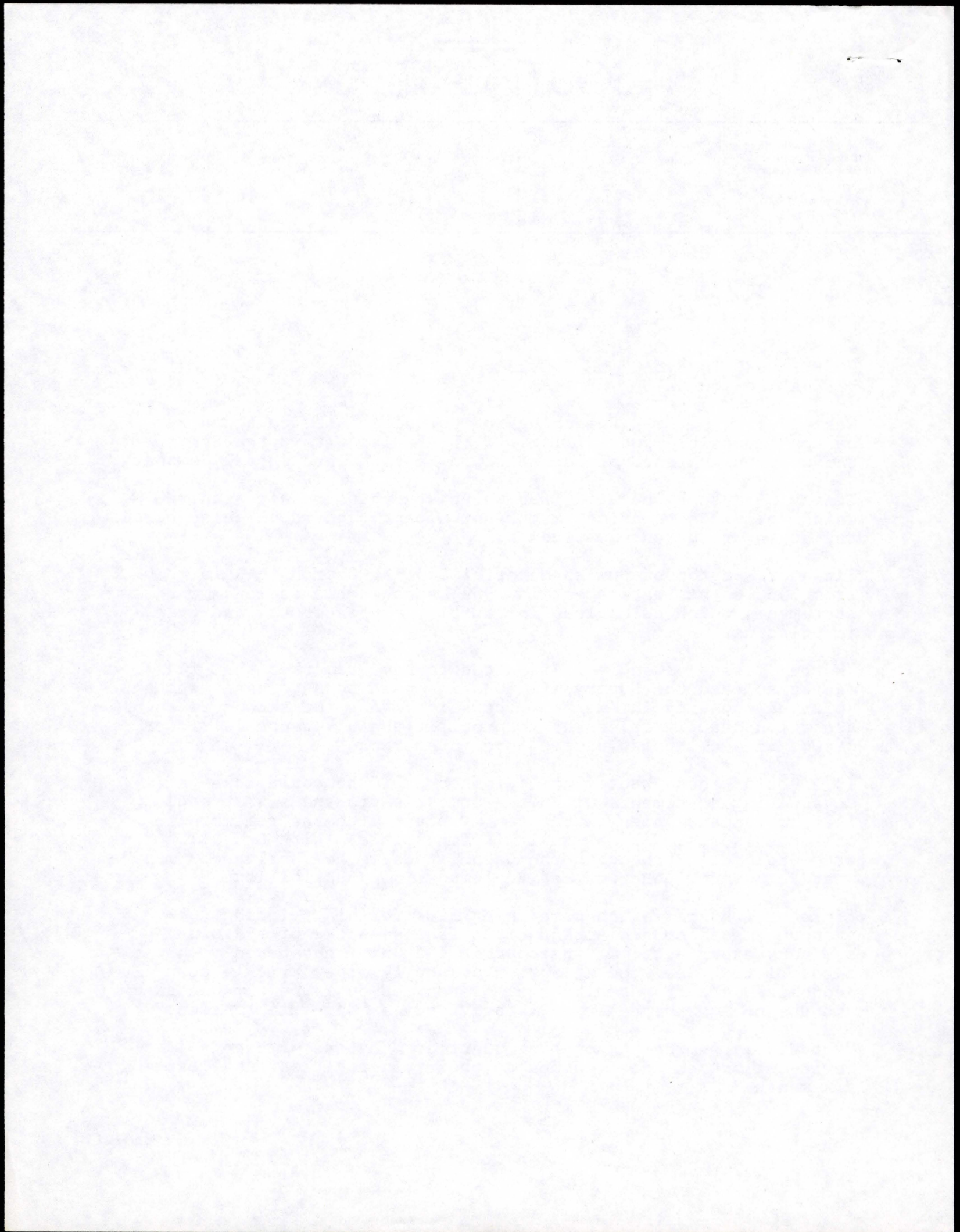
"Mother Teresa of India is reported to have remarked that it is easier to feed the hungry millions in India than to deal with the spiritual poverty in America," he said. "And the second is the assertion that it is easier to proclaim the unsearchable riches of God in a communist nation than in America."

In light of these statements, Finlator said he could take the devastating statements with "the utmost seriousness that could lead to despair unless I chasten my heart with the remembrance of Jesus' words: 'With men it is impossible. With God all things are possible.' Preaching the Gospel today," he continued, "may be what Reinhold Niebuhr called an 'impossible possibility.'"

Finlator, who has often come under fire for his stinging pronouncements on social and civil issues, spoke of his own seminary experience, noting that it left him unprepared to preach a gospel that included rejection of supply side, trickle down economics; the disestablishment of regimes by force, if necessary; and the notion that America is by virtue a "Christian nation."

"But did my seminary know," he queried, "that her students just could not preach those things to their congregations and last six months?"

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He spoke of three prides that seem prevalent in America today: pride of power, pride of wealth, and pride of spirit. To Americans, he said, "Might is right, and the Pentagon is worth every sacrifice." As to wealth, he said, "who is going to tell this richest of all nations that their wealth is based on exploitation and extraction from poorer nations?"

The veteran pastor also rejected the notion that America is a Christian nation simply because our motto is "In God We Trust." Finlator said that the pride of spirit is prevalent, and asked how ministers can preach a Gospel successfully that requires men to do justice, to love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.

To his original question, "Can the Gospel be preached in America today?", Finlator said, "Hardly, but hopefully. I speak this affirmative word over against a background of failure. Christianity, it is said, has not been tried and failed. Christianity has been tried, found hard, and given up.

"Can the Gospel be preached in America today? My answer, with fear and trembling, is a faltering, 'Yes.' I can tell you that it can be a lonely road, a risky business, and a heap of fun."

The Convocation was the first for 65 entering students. It was the last for Dr. Fred Sandusky, Registrar and Director of Admissions, who retires in March after serving for 30 of the seminary's 34 years.

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