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THOMAS BUFORD MASTON AND THE GROWTH OF SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY AMONG TEXAS BAPTISTS

by John W. Storey

In 1920 Thomas Buford Maston left Tennessee to enroll in Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Like other states of the former Confederacy, Texas then was predominantly rural, with an urban population of only 32.4 per cent.[1] And the seminary, which had been moved from the Baylor University campus in Waco to Fort Worth in 1910, was still a fledgling institution.[2] Forty-three years later, when Maston retired from the seminary, Texas and Southwestern had undergone significant changes. With over 75 per cent of its populace living in urban areas,[3] Texas had become one of the more urbanized states of the nation. It was a region accustomed to growth and change. Likewise, Southwestern Seminary was now a fully accredited institution enrolling more students than any other seminary.[4] Maston's long and distinguished career at the seminary coincided not only with institutional progress, however, but also with a growing awareness among fellow Texas Baptists of the social dimensions of the gospel.

Developments within the Baptist General Convention of Texas, particularly since World War II, suggest that Texas churchmen have become more alert to social ills. Although many factors account for this, Maston's influence has been unmistakable. Through two generations of students, many of whom have occupied important denominational positions, numerous books, countless articles in denominational papers, and the Christian Life Commission of Texas, Maston, more so than any other Texas Baptist, broadened the social awareness of his fellow Baptists. Established in 1950, the Christian Life Commission, for instance, the agency primarily responsible for informing and educating Texas Baptists on social matters, mirrors Maston's concern for a practical application of the scriptures.

Church historian Samuel S. Hill, Jr. has asserted that Southern Baptists have tended "to reflect the values held by their surrounding culture rather than to prompt critical assessment of those values." Only after "legislative and legal requirements made it all but mandatory," for instance, did Southern Baptists "exert much leadership in implementing humane treatment of those blacks who share the same geographical space." Consequently, Hill concluded that "Southern Baptists have not managed typically to transcend themselves or to become prophetic visionaries."[5] While generally accurate for many Southern Baptists, Hill's observation does not apply to Maston, who challenged his culture, especially in the area of race, many years prior to the landmark *Brown* decision of 1954. And, significantly, Maston did it within a conservative

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theological framework.[6] Indeed, it is doubtful that it could have been otherwise. Maston could not have retained his position for so many years at Southwestern nor exercised much influence on fellow churchmen had he not shared the theological conservatism of most Texas Baptists. Theologically, Maston was at home among conservative Southern Baptists. But on social issues, the seminarian was a progressive. Whereas some churchmen were perhaps inclined to dismiss social maladies as consequences of human depravity, Maston, while convinced of the flawed character of human nature, saw social ills as an indication of inequities within the social structure. So he continually prodded Texans to address themselves to public concerns, noting that Southern Baptists had "needed for a long time . . . a combination of what I call a basically conservative theology and a social liberalism." For Maston there was no contradiction in this.[7]

Maston emphasized the social applications of Christianity, but he was somewhat out of step within a denomination which historically stressed personal evangelism. And at times this caused him some uneasiness. Dr. Lee Rutland Scarborough, longtime president of the seminary, gave so much attention to soul winning that Maston felt uncomfortable. Such anxiety, however, was resolved relatively early: "I do not think of personal evangelism and ethics as being two separate things," explained Maston, "They are just two ways of looking at the same coin." While neither aspect should be neglected, Maston believed his ". . . primary emphasis ought to be on discipleship, the kind of life lived *after* one has been converted."[8] Knowing that other churchmen would continue to stress personal evangelism and missions, Maston chose to emphasize social ethics.

But why should a Texas Baptist such as Maston, who spent his academic career in a conservative environment, be so concerned about social Christianity? Why was he able to rise above his culture on the issue of race, especially since so many of his contemporaries, whether in or out of the church, were unable to do so? Family background and educational development shed some light.

Family background evidently kindled an interest in social issues. "I know some folks move away and forget . . ." their origins, recalled Maston ". . . but I definitely think this had a definite influence in my life . . ." especially in ". . . the concern about people."[9] Maston was born in Jefferson County, Tennessee, in 1897. His parents were "very poor." His father, who grew up in East Tennessee after the Civil War, toiled as a farm laborer, a section hand on a railroad, and a share cropper. Pursuit of work led the Maston family to a small Ohio village, College Corner, in 1901. After a decade, the family returned to Tennessee, settling on a farm near Fountain City, where Maston grew to maturity.

Despite a rather humble and migratory existence, the Maston family was stable. The parents enjoyed a successful marriage and exerted a positive influence upon their children. Maston was particularly close to his father, whose subsequent influence was considerable.[10]

Since his family was poor, Maston always identified with underprivileged people. Because of his father's experience as a railroad section hand, for instance, he developed rather early a sympathy for unionism. His father, while not an activist committed to any particular social program, joined the railroad union for practical reasons. It helped the laborers. So Maston saw the benefits of unionization, and thus could later identify with those southern miners, mill hands, lumber jacks, and agricultural laborers who struggled against formidable odds to unionize in the early twentieth century. Family conditions, then, Maston later recalled . . . "have explained to some degree what I hope has been a genuine, sincere interest in the underprivileged, the poor, and the disinherited in general in our society."[11]

But why should Maston's concern for the underprivileged cut across racial lines? Why should a poor white from East Tennessee develop such an interest in racial justice? Historically, poor southern whites have generally resisted efforts by blacks to improve their status in society. Motivated by economic and social fears, poor whites frequently released their frustrations in acts of violence against blacks.[12] Again, Maston's home environment was important. "My folks seemingly had no racial prejudice, [and] I never heard it expressed at all . . ." he observed. Maston, moreover, was affected by Biblical stories dealing with racial equality. "I think the attitude that I early developed grew *primarily* out of my reading and study of the New Testament and the attitude of Jesus, particularly toward the Samaritans . . ." he said ". . . because they were the most hated group by the Jews, of that time."[13]

Even Maston, however, could not explain why those Biblical stories made such an impression upon him when so many of his contemporaries, who read the same stories, were not similarly affected. Other southern whites whose socioeconomic and religious conditions were similar to Maston's were not moved by those scriptures to challenge their culture. Indeed, despite those passages alluding to racial justice, southern religion, for most whites at least, reinforced cultural norms regarding the status of blacks in the South. As church historian Rufus B. Spain pointed out, "Theories of race were as much a part of Southern Baptist thinking as the Virgin Birth or Second Coming."[14] This could be said of Baptist thought well into the twentieth century.

Perhaps the nature of Maston's early association with blacks was important. Since few blacks lived in the Tennessee and Ohio communities where Maston grew up, he actually had little contact with blacks during his formative years. There were only two black families in

College Corner, where Maston entered public school. Although limited, this association was positive. He sat across the aisle in school from a black child and played with him at recess on the playground.[15] This in itself was significant, for in the segregated school systems of the South Maston could not have had such an experience. Furthermore, unlike whites in areas of the deep South whose fears sometimes were accentuated by the preponderance of blacks, the Maston family never felt threatened. Upon returning to Tennessee in 1911, for instance, the family had little contact at all with blacks.[16] This did not change until Maston entered Yale University in the 1930s. So from childhood to maturity Maston's contact with blacks was positive in nature, albeit limited in terms of numbers. And despite humble origins, Maston, first at College Corner and later at Yale, had opportunities to associate with blacks on a basis that other southern whites who never ventured outside the South could not have shared. Whatever the precise reasons, Maston, from early life on, genuinely cared for underprivileged people, black as well as white. "But why that attitude [of caring for blacks], I don't know . . ." acknowledged Maston, "I really don't." Perhaps, said he, it was ". . . partly due to the fact that we were so poor that we had sympathy for these folks [blacks] who were [also] underprivileged."[17]

While the exact origins of Maston's concern for racial justice cannot be pinpointed, his educational development no doubt broadened his understanding of social issues, including race. Maston's mother and father, who completed only the third and eighth grades respectively, were eager for their son to attend college, although they were unable to provide financial assistance. A timely loan from a local Fountain City high school English teacher and campus jobs as a custodian of sorts and a waiter in the men's dorm enabled Maston to attend Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee, from 1916 to 1920. Maston's recollection of his undergraduate schooling was not particularly flattering. There were no memorable teachers or courses.[18] As for the social gospel, said Maston, "I remember hearing of [Walter] Rauschenbusch, but that was all."[19]

But in 1920, beginning an institutional relationship that lasted forty-three years, Maston entered Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where he studied in some depth the social applications of Christianity. Dr. John M. Price, a member of the School of Religious Education, regularly taught a course on the social teachings of the Bible, which Maston took his first year at the seminary.[20] In the School of Theology, Maston encountered Dr. Walter T. Conner, a noted Baptist theologian who had done some work under Walter Rauschenbusch while studying at Rochester Theological Seminary in New York from 1908-1910.[21] So at Southwestern in the early 1920s Maston became familiar with the social gospel ministers, especially

Rauschenbusch. "The whole atmosphere of Southern Baptists at that particular time [early 1920s] was rather sympathetic . . ." to the social gospel, Maston insisted. Baptists raised few objections to the social gospel movement until they identified it, incorrectly Maston believed, with theological liberalism.[22]

In 1922, while still working on a master's degree in the School of Religious Education, Maston accepted an opportunity to teach a course at the seminary on applied Christianity. This was the beginning of a distinguished teaching career which lasted until 1963. By 1925 the new instructor had obtained master's and doctoral degrees from Southwestern. His pursuit of formal education, however, was not over. Reflecting his interest in social issues, he obtained a Master of Arts in Sociology from Texas Christian University in 1927, and took summer courses at the University of North Carolina and the University of Chicago in 1928 and 1929 respectively. Howard W. Odum, a respected authority on southern culture, was one of Maston's professors at North Carolina.[23] While such training broadened his social vision, race was already a matter of paramount concern. In 1927 he wrote "Racial Revelations," a pamphlet later published by the Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention. This was the first of a long series of observations by Maston on race and the Bible.[24]

In 1932, at the depth of the Great Depression, Maston entered Yale University. "I wanted to go to a big university," he said, "because all my previous experience had been in these smaller institutions." Maston also went to Yale ". . . to expand my view . . . to broaden my perspective."[25] While not significantly changed, Maston's social thinking was refined at Yale. He studied under H. Richard Niebuhr and examined thoroughly the works of Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, and Emil Brunner. Although acknowledging the influence of Richard Niebuhr, Maston believed "the overall impact of Yale" was more important than association with any one scholar.[26] In 1939 Maston obtained a PhD from Yale. Meanwhile, the range of his social concerns was indicated in a series of lessons he had written for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in 1933. Topic headings included "The Young Christian and Social Problems," "Christianizing Economic Life," "Improving Society Through Legislation," and "The Christian Attitude Toward Other Races."[27]

Maston's social consciousness, then, was kindled by humble family origins and refined by educational experiences. But how did he exert influence among fellow Texas Baptists, churchmen whose primary concern had always been personal evangelism? There are at least four bases of influence within the Baptist General Convention of Texas: the editorship of the *Baptist Standard* (Dallas), which has a substantially wider circulation than any other Southern Baptist weekly;[28] pastorates

of the large urban congregations, such as those in Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, or Houston; full time executive positions within the bureaucracy of the Texas Baptist General Convention, such as the director of the Christian Life Commission in Dallas; and the professoriate at Southwestern Seminary, who train future denominational leaders. Maston's base of influence was the seminary. As a respected member of the Southwestern faculty, his writings, through which he continually reminded Baptists of their social responsibilities, carried considerable weight. People listened to Maston, a former student remarked, because of *who* he was and *what* he said.[29] And through his students, many of whom rose to prominence, his influence penetrated every level of Baptist life.

Ethics, or applied Christianity, was taught at Southwestern Seminary before Maston arrived. From time to time, William W. Barnes, Charles B. Williams, John M. Price, and James B. Gambrell offered a course on practical applications of the gospel. And in 1921, when the School of Religious Education was formed, applied Christianity was a part of the program.[30] After joining the Religious Education faculty in 1922, however, Maston steadily expanded course offerings in ethics and increasingly emphasized race. *Home and Foreign Fields* carried a Maston article on race in 1929.[31] In 1938, one year after the teaching of ethics was moved from Religious Education to the School of Theology, Maston introduced a new course, "Social Problems in the South," concentrating largely on racial conditions.[32] Beginning in 1942 Maston taught ethics full time, and two years later he offered a course on "The Church and the Race Problem". For this class, Fort Worth became a laboratory. Students took field trips through black neighborhoods; they investigated specific aspects of the city's race problem, such as the public school system and blacks; and prominent blacks were invited to address the class.[33]

As Maston developed courses on applied Christianity and wrote lessons on social problems for Sunday school and training union quarterlies in the 1920s and 1930s, he increasingly felt the need to attend a prestige university. His background in religious education evidently was suspect to some members of the academic community at Southwestern, particularly among "the old-timers in the school of theology," whose ranks Maston joined in 1937.[34] Although never verbalized, Maston sensed some resistance in the School of Theology, primarily from Dr. Walter T. Conner. "I had a little problem coming from religious education over to theology," observed Maston, "I don't know of any formal resistance . . ." but ". . . I do know it took a little while to win . . . respect, from the viewpoint of scholarship and publishing."[35]

An Ivy League diploma was helpful, but ultimate academic acceptance, even from Conner, who was chairman of the committee of gradu-

ate study, came as many of the better graduate students at Southwestern went into Christian ethics. When "These sudents began to specialize in ethics," declared Maston, "my colleagues were more or less forced to increase their respect for the [ethics] department."[36] And in the 1940s and 1950s Maston, although a demanding teacher, did draw some of the better students.[37] Many factors accounted for this. Maston was always prepared for class; he stayed abreast of current literature in his field; he synthesized material from diverse sources; and he had time for students, undergraduates as well as graduates, outside the classroom. He was not a dynamic lecturer. His classroom style was "quiet, conversational, [and] folksy."[38] Former students held him in lofty esteem.[39]

By the time of Maston's retirement, forty-nine students had completed doctoral requirements under his guidance.[40] Many other seminarians had minored in ethics under Maston, and several thousand undergraduates had taken at least a few of his courses in applied Christianity.[41] Bill Moyers, an aide to former President Lyndon B. Johnson, had studied under Maston and would have majored in ethics had he remained at Southwestern.[42] Perhaps Maston's greatest influence in Baptist life has been through his students, particularly those who specialized in ethics. As pastors, denominational executives, professors, and foreign missionaries, Maston's doctoral students have become involved in every aspect of denominational life. Forty-seven have been pastors; twenty-one, denominational executives; fifteen, seminary professors; thirteen, missionaries; four, government officials; and two, military chaplains. Of the six Southern Baptist seminary presidents, two are Maston graduates; two others minored under him.[43] And the Christian Life Commission of Texas, which has labored since its creation in 1950 to expand the social vision of Texas churchmen, has been dominated by Maston students. With the exception of Acker C. Miller, the first director of the new agency, all the directors of the Commission have been Maston graduates: Foy Valentine, 1953-1960; Jimmy Allen, 1960-1968; and James Dunn, who has held the post since 1968. Upon resigning from the Christian Life Commission of Texas, Valentine became Executive-Secretary of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. He still holds this influential position. And Allen, who is now pastor of the First Baptist Church, San Antonio, has served as president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1970-1971, and of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1977-1979. Moreover, striving to minister to the needs of the San Antonio community, Allen has led his racially integrated congregation to implement an impressive array of social programs.[44] When asked why he had not carried placards or marched in protest parades, as other people who shared his concern for social justice had done, Maston replied "... that there is a place for some folk who stay primarily right here in the classroom

at the seminary." The activities of Maston's students would seem to bear him out, for, as Maston observed, they "... have gotten involved in ways that I could not and ways that I would not feel comfortable."[45]

But as Maston recognized, his influence beyond the classroom stemmed also from his writings.[46] A prolific author, Maston wrote nineteen books, ten published after retirement, and innumerable Sunday school and training union lessons, pamphlets, articles, and columns in the Baptist weeklies, notably the *Baptist Standard*.[47] His literary endeavors were twofold. He wanted to do "something that would be reasonably accepted from the viewpoint of college and seminary teachers, something more or less scholarly." *Christianity and World Issues* (Macmillan, 1957) and *Biblical Ethics: A Biblical Survey* (World, 1967), which Maston considered his most scholarly efforts, grew out of this desire. Another reason Maston went to Yale was to enhance general academic acceptance of his scholarly works. He did not want to be ignored just because he "... was a Southern Baptist ... teaching way out here in the Southwest."[48]

That Maston sought academic respectability and recognition was apparent. None the less, instead of addressing himself "... generally to the Christian community ... " he devoted his attention primarily to Southern Baptists.[49] So in addition to learned studies, Maston wrote "these simpler books for the masses." Publications such as *Right or Wrong?* (Broadman, 1955) and *God's Will and Your Life* (Broadman, 1964), both directed at young people, were of this type.[50] Practically all of Maston's writings for the rank-and-file arose from a sense of need. Certainly this was the case with race. This "was a major issue," Maston recalled, and understanding was essential. Almost a decade before the 1954 *Brown* decision, *Of One* (1946), published by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, strongly advocated racial justice. While perhaps the most controversial,[51] this was not Maston's only book in this sensitive area. *The Bible and Race* (1959), which Broadman Press finally published after Maston toned it down some, and *Segregation and Desegregation* (1959), written upon request by Macmillan, offered calm advice for Christians grappling with racial issues in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[52]

And Maston's writings "for the masses," including articles in the *Baptist Standard*, pamphlets, and the aforementioned books, had considerable impact. To be sure, many readers dismissed the seminarian with the usual epithets. He was a "Negro lover," a dupe of the Communists, a trouble maker, unfit to teach in a Baptist institution, an amalgamationist, and just plain ignorant. A San Antonio woman who identified herself as "a Southern Baptist ... and a loyal and patriotic American" asserted that *Of One* "... is not Christian, or American!" "And if that," added she, "is what you teach in the Seminary, and else-

where, you should not be allowed to teach, or instruct. I never want one of my children to become indoctrinated with such nonsense!" Another critic, who wondered ". . . how much . . . the negroes of this country [were] paying Maston . . ." exclaimed: "If I were you I'd shut my mouth. If you want to live with negroes, go live with them, but don't try to make other people do it."[54] Buford C. Stockard, pastor of the Morningside Baptist Church, Graham, Texas, reacting to a series of Sunday school lessons written in 1958, accused Maston of "either purposely or ignorantly" propagating "the Pro-Communist line for Social Justice."[55] And after reading *Segregation and Desegregation*, a businessman from East Chicago, Indiana, concluded that Maston was "doing the whites great harm."[56]

Many other respondents warmly commended Maston, however, pointing out that his writings had been timely and helpful. Arthur B. Rutledge, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Marshall, Texas, who had minored in ethics under Maston, thanked his former mentor for *Of One*. Prejudice was "deep-seated" among many members of his East Texas congregation, Rutledge acknowledged, ". . . but at the same time I feel that as Christians we must make every possible effort to approach the Christian ideal."[57] The pastor of the Southside Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, regretful that the editor of *The Baptist Message*, the Baptist weekly of Louisiana, deviated ". . . so far from the clear teachings . . . of our Savior," praised Maston "for the splendid article written for our state paper" on race relations.[58] And from Chester, Virginia, a high school senior wrote that *Segregation and Desegregation* had been very helpful in a recent school debate on integration. "We as Christians must not continue discrimination of the races by segregation," she asserted."[59] Overall, letters favorable and unfavorable to Maston's writings on race balanced out fairly evenly.

While the classroom and the pen were the major sources of his influence, Maston did not confine himself entirely to those endeavors. An ordained deacon in the Gambrell Avenue Baptist Church, Fort Worth, he worked with his pastor to achieve desegregation of the local congregation. This was accomplished without incident.[60] And the admission of blacks in 1951 to day classes[61] at Southwestern was the culmination of an effort begun within the seminary by Maston, other faculty members, and President Scarborough. The faculty would have admitted blacks even earlier, Maston insisted. The resistance came from the Trustees and rank-and-file Southern Baptists.[62] Maston also accepted many speaking engagements. In 1961, for instance, as Dallas was grappling with school desegregation, Maston addressed the Dallas Baptist Pastors' Conference on "The Pastor's Role in a Community Facing School Desegregation." Since the *Dallas Morning News* covered the meeting, his remarks had an impact throughout the area. He

received over twenty letters, most of them "very critical."[64] A Weatherford Baptist, after reading the *Dallas Morning News* account, "was ashamed that a Baptist preacher" would so express himself." I hope people are not so ignorant that they believe what you are teaching."[65] At least a few readers, however, thought Maston's comments were "well said and so very needful. How I hope and pray your advice will be heeded."[66]

Maston's career demonstrates that individual effort can be significant. Maston believed that long-standing social ills, however, particularly in the area of race, required group effort. Individuals had to cooperate through organizations and institutions to accomplish needed change. Hence, Maston belonged to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League in Fort Worth, although admittedly not too active.[67] In Maston's judgement, the church should lead the effort for social betterment, particularly racial justice.[68]

Mason's concern for racial justice set in motion shortly after World War II a sequence of events culminating in the creation of the Christian Life Commission, the agency through which Texas Baptists have grappled with social ills, including race. In 1948 Maston corresponded with a small group of Texas Baptists, including Dr. J. Howard Williams, the executive-secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, about the possibility of a Christian Action Conference in Fort Worth.[69] This conference never materialized, but at the 1949 Baptist convention in El Paso Williams, who had suffered a heart attack in 1948, appointed a three man committee consisting of Maston, William R. White, president of Baylor University, and Acker C. Miller, director of the Department of Interracial Cooperation, to study how Texas Baptists could most effectively deal with social issues. This trio quickly evolved into the Committee of Seven, with Maston as chairman.[70] In November, 1950, when Texas Baptists convened in Fort Worth, Maston's committee recommended the establishment of the Christian Life Commission. "The major need of our day is an effective working combination of a conservative theology, an aggressive, constructive evangelism and a progressive application of the spirit and teachings of Jesus to every area of life," declared the committee. The Christian Life Commission was to be the vehicle for implementing these objectives, especially the application of Christian ideals to daily life.[71]

Maston and other prominent churchmen later recalled that the Christian Life Commission was primarily the work of J. Howard Williams.[72] Admittedly, the support of Williams was crucial. He was an indefatigable denominational worker who possessed superior organizational talents. He was able to work easily with men of differing views, and hence gain broad support for his plans. While serving as executive-secretary of the Convention from 1946-1953, Williams was a member

of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, and Dr. W. A. Criswell was a close friend.[73] Later, as president of Southwestern Seminary from 1953 until his death in 1958, he and Maston enjoyed a warm friendship.[74] So Williams clearly was a denominational leader who knew how to get things done, and his endorsement of the Christian Life Commission was essential.

In other ways, however, Maston and Miller were just as important. Through his writings on race and other social issues, Maston had helped educate Texas Baptists on the need for a practical application of the scriptures. Moreover, he had schooled an "army" of students who were ideally suited to work through an agency such as the Christian Life Commission. Miller, director since 1944 of the Department of Interracial Cooperation, was already in the field working to improve race relations in Texas.[75] Consequently, he was sympathetic with the purpose of the Christian Life Commission, and raised no objections when his department was absorbed by the new agency.[76] Furthermore, as director of the Commission from 1950-1953, Miller, a widely respected churchman, provided able leadership.

Although initially there was no expressed opposition to the Christion Life Commission, criticism soon surfaced.[77] This has led to speculation that the Commission, basically out of step with the sentiment of rank-and-file Texas Baptists, was fashioned by leaders who were ahead of their constituents on social issues. Dr. Ralph Phelps, a Maston graduate who taught ethics at Southwestern before assuming the presidency of Ouachita Baptist College in Arkansas, served on the Committee of Seven in 1950. He insisted that the Christian Life Commission would never have been established if most Texas Baptists had realized that the new agency was going to be so active. "Texas Baptists didn't have the foggiest idea that the Christian Life Commission would ever amount to anything," he asserted, "or they would [not] have approved it."[78] Maston would not go so far as Phelps, but nevertheless agreed that the Christian Life Commission was primarily the result of constructive Baptist leadership. "But . . . that's not only true of the Christian Life Commission," added he, "but almost everything else."[79]

To be sure, the Christian Life Commission was the handiwork of capable Baptist leaders, some of whom, such as Maston, certainly were ahead of other Texans, non-Baptists as well as Baptists, in understanding racial and social ills. By the early 1950s, however, many local pastors and laymen were prepared to support an organized effort in behalf of social justice. As chairman of the Committee on Work Among Negro Baptists, Charles T. Alexander, a member of Gaston Avenue Baptist Church, Dallas, had diligently cultivated cooperation between black and white Baptist leaders from 1936 to 1943.[80] Arthur B. Rutledge, whose Marshall congregation was in predominantly black

Harrison County, began nudging his followers toward racial justice in the late 1940s.[81] He later served as chairman of the Christian Life Commission.[82] In 1951 Jimmy Allen, who was then pastoring the First Baptist Church of Van Alstyne, a small community approximately seventy miles north of Dallas, collaborated with two other local pastors in organizing a racially integrated service. The program revolved around a Boy Scout Day, explained Allen, but the "... real purpose was to pull the people together across the racial line."[83] Likewise, H. Strauss Atkinson, then pastor of the First Baptist Church, Canyon, and Vernon O. Elmore, who pastored the Baptist Temple, San Antonio, before moving to the First Baptist Church, Corpus Christi, both championed racial justice early in the 1950s.[84] So at the grass roots level there were some Texas churchmen who were striving for a practical application of the scriptures, especially in the area of race, prior to the 1954 *Brown* decision. As Foy Valentine assessed the situation, the Christian Life Commission was not "an outgrowth of a particularly expanding social awareness among Texas Baptists in general," but conditions nevertheless were favorable.[85]

Advantageous circumstances also prevailed within Texas by the early 1950s. If the South's resistance to change can be attributed to its rural background and traditional values, as some observers have claimed,[86] the Christian Life Commission was launched at a propitious moment in Texas history. With 62.7% of its populace classed as urban, Texas was no longer a rural state by 1950. Fort Worth, Maston's home, more than tripled from 1920 to 1960, increasing from 106,482 to 356,268, while Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, El Paso, and Beaumont-Port Arthur all experienced dramatic growth from 1940 to 1960. As elsewhere, race was a serious problem in these Texas cities, particularly with regard to housing, jobs, and education. After the 1954 *Brown* ruling, however, southern urban leaders often sought to ease racial tension, "less because they were committed to full racial equality than because they desired to protect their businesses and their national urban image."[88] So in terms of the urbanization of Texas and the readiness of many local Baptists to accept its leadership in applied Christianity, the Christian Life Commission began under favorable circumstances.

The new Commission set about immediately to educate the masses of Texas Baptists. Christian Life Committees, organized at the local associational level, conducted conferences, workshops, and special programs across Texas emphasizing the practical aspects of faith. In 1956 there were only fourteen such committees. Four years later there were 110.[89] The Commission, furthermore, developed and widely distributed a body of literature entitled "The Bible Speaks." These brief pamphlets were designed to acquaint local churchmen with such issues as drugs, race relations, abortion, capital punishment, church and state, political

involvement, family problems, black power, pollution, poverty, aging, political extremism, and others.[61] Hence, the Christian Life Commission was a "think tank" of sorts, striving to keep Texas Baptists informed on current issues. While continuing to serve this purpose, the Commission under Jimmy Allen's leadership from 1960-1968 ventured into Texas politics. Allen spent many hours in Austin lobbying state legislators.[62] The present director, James Dunn, has continued this political activism.

Despite occasional anger over its position on some controversial issue, the Christian Life Commission has become an established part of the bureaucracy of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and has gained, it seems, the acceptance of most Texas Baptists. This has been accomplished, to some extent at least, by pursuing basically a conservative strategy. While dramatizing for Texas Baptists the urgency of applied Christianity, and thus the desirability of social change in certain areas, the Christian Life Commission has consistently counselled moderation and gradualism. Again, the influence and thought of Thomas Maston are apparent.

Theological conservatism, as Maston's actions show, does not automatically predispose one to view social ills as consequences of human depravity, and hence something to be endured rather than solved. Although convinced of the tenacity of human evil, Maston perceived environmental roots for racial and other social injustices. So like Walter Rauschenbusch, whom he admired, and Reinhold Niebuhr, whom he encountered at Yale,[63] Maston's theological conservatism in no way diminished his social concern. Nevertheless, Maston's strategy for improving society was distinctly conservative. While theological conservatism did not obscure his grasp of social maladies, it predisposed him, as it has the directors of the Christian Life Commission of Texas, toward a cautious political strategy. For two generations Maston advised Southwestern students to proceed cautiously when dealing with sensitive issues. If one moved too rapidly and aggressively, local churchmen would become alienated and all chance for improvement lost. Clarence Jordan, the noted Southern Baptist who in 1942 founded Koinonia Farm, an integrated community near Americus, Georgia, was a case in point. Jordan's outspokenness, Maston believed, eroded his influence. The seminarian readily conceded, however, that people like Jordan made it easier for moderates such as himself to gain acceptance. Still, Maston insisted, one must "start where the people are and keep the pressure in the right place, pointed in the right direction." This eventually would yield desirable results.[64]

Reformers eager for quick improvement would readily find fault with Maston's cautiousness. Even Maston recognized the danger in his strategy of compromising too much and settling for too little.[65] On the

basis of his accomplishments and the expanded social vision of Texas Baptists, as reflected in the Christian Life Commission, Maston never compromised too much.

NOTES

[1]*Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1970-1971* (Dallas, 1969), 165. Prior to 1950 the *Texas Almanac* defined "urban" as an incorporated area with a population of 2,500 or more. Everything else was "rural." Since 1950 all persons living in incorporated or unincorporated areas of 2,500 or more have been classed as "urban." See *Texas Almanac*, 1970-1971, 165.

[2]*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville, 1958), II, 1279-1283.

[3]*Texas Almanac*, 165.

[4]*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, II, 1284; III, 1985.

[5]John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity, A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville, 1972), 207-208.

[6]Since there are many varieties of conservatism, the term is difficult to define. As used here, however, conservatism is characterized by an emphasis upon Original Sin and human evil; skepticism of human reason and progress; and an emphasis on the transcendence of God.

[7]Thomas B. Maston, Interview with John W. Storey, Fort Worth, March 16, 1979, 5, 34-35. All citations from this interview are taken from a typed transcript of taped conservations.

[8]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 6, 8, 12, 29.

[9]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 3.

[10]Oral Memoirs of T. B. Maston, Waco 1973, Baylor University Program of Oral History, 10. All citations from Oral Memoirs are taken from typed transcripts of tape-recorded interviews (Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco).

[11]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 1-5.

[12]John Samuel Ezell, *The South Since 1865* (New York, 1963, 360-63.

[13]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 40.

[14]Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion, Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville, 1967), 120.

[15]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 40.

[16]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 40.

[17]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 41.

[18]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 10-13.

[19]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 13.

[20]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 23.

[21]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 24.

[22]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 24-25. See also Lynn Ray Musslewhite, *Texas in the 1920's: A History of Social Change* (Unpublished dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1975), 338-40, who notes that Baptists and Methodists in Texas responded ambivalently to social ills in the 1920s. Although recognizing the importance of dealing with social ills, both groups continued to stress the primacy of individual salvation. Nevertheless, Musselwhite's study supports Maston's recollection that there was considerable, albeit perhaps rhetorical, support for the social gospel in Texas in the early 1920s.

[23]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 15-20.

[24]W. T. Moore, *His Heart is Black* (Atlanta, 1978), 61.

[25]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 11.

[26]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 11.

[27]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 71-72.

[28]*Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, III, 1599, 1645, 1938. See also Oral Memoirs of E. S. James, Waco, 1973, Baylor University Program of Oral History, 214-15.

[29]Joe E. Trull, taped interview, August 16, 1979, Garland, Texas.

[30]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 108.

[31]William M. Pinson, Jr. (ed.), *An Approach to Christian Ethics, The Life, Contribution, and Thought of T. B. Maston* (Nashville, 1979), 63.

[32]Pinson, *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, 62.

[33]Pinson, *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, 62.

[34]Oral Memoirs of Ralph A. Phelps, Jr., Waco, 1972, Baylor University Program of Oral History, 25.

[35]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 12.

[36]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 31.

[37]Oral Memoirs, Phelps, 25; James M. Dunn, Interview with John W. Storey, Dallas, May 23, 1979, 14 (All citations from this interview are taken from a transcript of tape-recorded conversations); and Foy Valentine, Letter to John W. Storey, August 20, 1979.

[38]Dunn, Interview with J.W.S., 11-15.

[39]Pinson, *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, is a tribute to Maston, consisting of brief articles written by twenty-three of his former students.

[40]Thomas B. Maston, Letter to John W. Sotrey, October 18, 1978.

[41]Pinson, *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, 91.

[42]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 21.

[43]Pinson, *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, 91-92, 94-96; Maston, Letter to J.W.S., October 18, 1978.

[44]Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen, Waco, 1973, Baylor University Program of Oral History, 173-88.

[45]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 8-9.

[46]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 9.

[47]Pinson, *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, 83-85.

[48]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 141, 145.

[49]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 12.

[50]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 145-46.

[51]Thomas B. Maston, Letter to John W. Storey, August 17, 1979.

[52]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 138-40.

[53]Letter to T. B. Maston, March 21, 1952. All of Maston's correspondence is in the Treasury Room, Fleming Library, Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Fort Worth.

[54]Letter to T. B. Maston, written in response to "Southern Baptists and the Negro," 1956.

[55]Letter to T. B. Maston, February 22, 1961, from B.C.S.

[56]Letter to T. B. Maston, October 6, 1959, from Kenneth G. Ansley.

[57]Letter to T. B. Maston, May 9, 1946, from A.B.R.

[58]Letter to T. B. Maston, October 3, 1957, from Bob Taylor.

[59]Letter to T. B. Maston, October 30, 1960, from Susan Bock.

[60]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 26-29.

[61]Blacks had been attending night classes at Southwestern for several years prior to 1951. Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 25.

[62]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 25-26.

[63]Letter from T. B. Maston, March 27, 1961, to Mrs. Travis Carrington.

[64]This was a common, but erroneous, assumption. Maston was a layman, having never been ordained as a minister.

[65]Letter to Thomas B. Maston, February 23, 1961, from Mrs. Mattie Buckley.

[66]Letter to Thomas B. Maston, March 20, 1961, from Mrs. Travis Carrington.

[67]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 8.

[68]See Thomas B. Maston, *Of One* (Atlanta, 1946), 8; and Thomas B. Maston, *Christianity and World Issues* (New York, 1957), 79.

[69]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 14-15.

[70]Baptist General Convention of Texas, *Proceedings,* 1949, 25, 174, cited hereafter as BGCT, *Proceedings.*

[71]BGCT, *Proceedings,* 1950, 180-88.

[72]Oral Memoirs, Maston, 100; Oral Memoirs of Acker C. Miller, Waco, 1973, Baylor University Program of Oral History, 82; Oral Memoirs, Phelps, 44; and Valentine, Letter to J.W.S., August 20, 1979.

[73]H. C. Brown, Jr., and Charles P. Johnson (eds.), *J. Howard Williams, Prophet of God and Friend of Man* (San Antonio, 1963), 48, 57, 123.

[74]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 15, 20.

[75]BGCT, *Proceedings,* 1944, 187.

[76]BGCT, *Proceedings,* 1950, 173, 175, 181; and 1951, 198.

[77]Oral Memoirs, Miller, 71.

[78]Oral Memoirs, Phelps, 44-45.

[79]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 16.

[80]BGCT, *Proceedings,* 1936, 99; 1942, 82-84; and 1943, 67-69.

[81]Letter to Maston, May 9, 1946, from Rutledge.

[82]BGCT, *Proceedings,* 1951, 199.

[83]Oral Memoirs, Allen, 92-95.

[84]Dunn, Interview with J.W.S., 28.

[85]Valentine, Letter to J.W.S., August 20, 1979.

[86]Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity,* 55; and Spain, *At East in Zion,* 211.

[87]*Texas Almanac,* 165.

[88]*Texas Almanac,* 171-74.

[89]Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban South in the Twentieth Century* (St. Charles, Missouri, 1974), 24-27.

[90]*Christian Life Commission, Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1950-1970* (Dallas, n. d.), 8.

[91]*Christian Life Commission,* 9-10.

[92]Oral Memoirs, Allen, 108-110.

[93]Reinhold Niebuhr taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York, but Maston, while studying at Yale, heard him speak on numerous occasions and read most of his works.

[94]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 50-51.

[95]Maston, Interview with J.W.S., 51-52.