

The presidential inauguration...

a restatement of values, commitments, traditions

Following is the complete text of President Fletcher's inaugural address delivered April 24, 1978:

The inauguration of a university president is seen by some as anachronistic, by others as quaint, by a few as wasteful, by a few more as inspiring, but by a surprising number as opportunity. Those who opted for this inauguration fall into the latter category. They initiated it as an opportunity to act out values, commitments, and significant traditions of this institution that, while inherently enduring, need to be restated in such ceremonial moments as this in order to be recherished and recentered in the life of the institution molded around them.

But it is more than opportunity; it is historic opportunity. I am deeply aware that I am being inaugurated as the twelfth president of Hardin-Simmons University. In the solemnity of this moment the contributions of the preceding eleven men who have carried this same burden to this point in time are sharply edged in my own awareness.

The Rev. W. C. Feiley
Dr. George O. Thatcher
Dr. O. C. Pope
The Rev. C. R. Hairfield
Dr. Oscar H. Cooper
Dr. Jefferson Davis Sandefur
Dr. William R. White
Dr. Rupert N. Richardson
Dr. Evan Allard Relf
Dr. James H. Landes
Dr. Elwin L. Skiles

Conventional wisdom has long held that inaugurations constitute bench marks in the ongoing history of the institution they represent. As such they are occasions for laying out new courses and stated goals, both with reference to the institution's historic and its immediate and emerging realities.

It was only in recent years when the toll of the task began rotating university presidents with alarming rapidity that inaugurations became optional events. Trustees, dismayed at the frequency with which they had to start searching all over again for leadership, questioned the wisdom of such. And presidents, cautious in the face of antecedently defeating constraints, wondered whether their tenure might be so short that an inauguration would only mock it.

Thus this inauguration may be said to represent two kinds of optimism: my optimism on one hand, and that of the faculty and trustees on the other. Consenting to the pomp and circumstance of an inaugural event involves a call to dig in deeply to leave tenure to providence with eyes only for the course that stretches before.

More significant, however, is the optimism of the trustees who authorized the inauguration and the faculty who planned it. Their confidence is not just in the person they invest with the medalion of leadership but in the future of the institution that individual is to lead. Which brings us to the heart of my remarks. Is this optimism—whether mine or theirs—well founded?

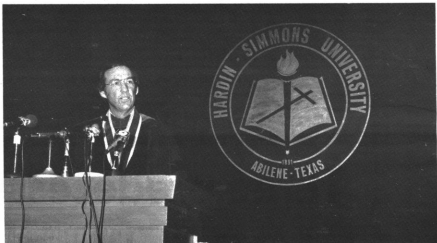
Shortly after I arrived on campus, a student stopped me at the door of Moody Center and asked me if the scheduling of an inauguration nearly six months later was based upon my desire to wait and see whether I would like it or the trustees' desire to wait and see whether they would like me. I told her that I was sure that the tradition that positioned such events at about this point in a new president's tenure had probably

been well grounded in both perspectives. But it does help one to have some time under the load before having to speak to the implications of a formal beginning. There is a certain credibility attached to the remarks and a certain integrity involved in their formation that only a few months in office make possible.

But my convictions concerning the shape of a responsible reply stem from another conversation that has been held with more than one person in these intervening weeks and months. "How are you doing?" I am asked. "Fine," I reply conventionally. "Do you have the answers yet?" I am queried. "No," I reply, "but I am isolating many of the questions."

What I would like to do now is review some of those questions. Then, though it may involve a presumption that could someday haunt me, some answers. (Continued on next page)

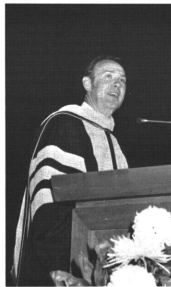
I stand in this place and accept this responsibility out of the deep conviction that the God whom I worship with all my being and to whom I was reconciled through Jesus Christ has led me.



Dr. Fletcher stands in front of newly adopted H-SU seal to deliver his inaugural address. Seal was adopted at the May meeting of the trustees' executive committee.



From left: Dr. James Flammig, pastor, First Baptist Church, Abilene; Dr. Fletcher; and Mrs. James Casle, H-SU board member.



Dr. Donald M. Anthony, director, Christian Education Coordinating Board.



President Fletcher and his father, Jesse N. Fletcher, San Antonio, speak to Abilene Mayor Oliver Howard.

Inaugural address, cont.

First of all the questions. Some are conventional and potentially pessimistic.

1. Can private institutions, with few built-in income escalators other than from tuition and fees, survive the eroding effects of long-term inflation?

Because tuition and fees should not constitute more than 50 percent of an institution's income to keep from making it too vulnerable to enrollment fluctuations, at least 50 percent of its income is essentially without protection from the devastating effects of inflation.

2. Will private institutions be allowed by government and the public education sector they have spawned to survive and flourish?

Increasingly, the debates on such things as tuition tax credits and tuition equalization grants involve a polarisation between public and private supporters indicating that the mutually enhancing realities of pluralism long accepted by both are being lost sight of in the dust of the battle.

3. More specifically, can private institutions, especially those of higher education, survive a choking regulatory system increasingly encroaching into the private sector?

An insidious thing might be happening in the history of these United States. Government interprets itself as representing the public and thus anything it does is public. It then reasons that anything done by individuals is private. Government, however, derives its authority from private citizens. Will these private citizens discover their own government regards their private institutions as a threat to its public institutions? Would this not be a tail-biting exercise of devouring proportions?

These questions are a bit pessimistic, even a bit paranoid; and the fact that they are being asked at all is indicative of the uneasy state of affairs that such leadership as I and my colleagues in Christian higher education are encountering at this time. Perhaps the next questions can be directed more to our immediate milieu and lead to more constructive thinking.

4. Will the churches whose faith in and sacrifice for institutions such as this continue to be willing to pay the price to have institutions where they can educate their own in a context of faith?

The leaders of those churches in the past were men and women whose vision reached beyond themselves. They spawned a world missions task that embraced a globe before we were truly aware of global realities. They planted institutions that called for the release of funds beyond the local church that indicated their vision was both historic and eternal rather than myopic and provincial. Are the leaders of our churches today from the same cut of cloth?

5. Will individuals of means continue to find both motivation and opportunity (back to government regulations again) to share their wealth with such institutions as ours thus buying up longevity and meaning for the wealth that God has entrusted to them either by circumstance or their own effort?

Were you to take from institutions like this the contributions of such indi-



Inaugural procession is led by Dr. Lindell Harris (right) and Dr. Otho Polk.

viduals you would strip land, facilities and influence from campuses and from history.

6. Will students continue to emerge from a largely public educational system with a desire for the personalism and recognition found in small institutions along with the demand for quality and responsibility also found in those institutions?

In an often mass produced educational product there can be found, along with lowered SAT scores and the puzzling predicament of social promotions, an alarming addiction to the anonymity found in numbers and to the security found in size.

7. Will teachers continue to believe that an area of freedom and a vector of purpose emerging from their own faith and professional commitment are worth the financial difference that will probably continue to exist between the tax funded institution and those of the private sector?

This institution's history is star studded with names like Watts, Olsen, Rister, Richardson, Bond, and Clinard who labored with such conviction. Is their kind still about?

It is obvious that I have stated questions and offered no answers. More, the answers I will now offer

are not necessarily answers to the questions, but they are answers. And long ago I committed myself to live life based on the answers God gave me rather than to remain paralyzed on the sidelines with the questions still unanswered.

For the fact that these answers are intensely per-

I became convinced that thousands of them are hungering for a place where they can combine a quality education to prepare their minds with a Christian community where they can confirm their adult faith.

sonal, I beg your indulgence and offer as rationale that without them my heart would not be open and my purpose would not be clear.

1. Despite the sobering questions I have asked and left unanswered, I stand in this place and accept this responsibility out of the deep conviction that the God whom I worship with all my being and to whom I was reconciled through Jesus Christ has led me.

When Abraham Lincoln was considering the Emancipation Proclamation, certain ministers came to him and said, "It is the will of God that you sign this." Then he was walked on by another group of ministers who said to him, "It is the will of God that you not sign this." Lincoln mused, "It seems to me that in a matter that so uniquely concerns me God would show me what His will in the matter is." Then he added, "And if I can determine what that is, I will surely do it."

After months of resisting this situation, I determined to be open enough to it to seek God's will in the matter. I am here because I also promised myself that if I could find what it was, I would surely do it.

2. Again despite my unanswered questions, I believe in the efficacy of Christian higher education.

I am a product of public education. My ministry has involved public institutions. Though I often spoke on Christian campuses. I was for years biased toward the larger fields to be found in the public arena. And today I remain a staunch defender of public education.

But a few years ago another institution similar to this one suggested I should come to such a post at their institution. The fact that they were interested in me launched me on a serious inquiry. The result was the decision to move in another direction. But Christian higher education had won the battle. I became convinced that the church had not only been historically dependent on its institutions of higher education but were in this day and time even more dependent upon them. My convictions were reflected in terms of my own children's educational choices, and I came to this post a confirmed convert of the necessity of what we do here.

3. A third answer emerged from my ministry during the years as I counseled young people on both the high school and college level regarding their personal pilgrimages. I became convinced that thousands of them are hungering for a place where they can combine a quality education to prepare their minds with a Christian community where they can confirm their adult faith. (Continued on next page)



President and Mrs. Fletcher, left, and Baylor University President and Mrs. Abner V. McCall.

Inaugural address, cont.

No university, even a Christian one, can be "in loco parentis" anymore. Time and circumstance, if not congress and legislation, have seen to that. But young people don't want foster parents. They want community. Hostile environments can teach one how to cope, but they are not places to chart clear-cut goals. The growth that results in the first is scar tissue, in the latter healthy tissue.

4. My fourth answer does speak to some of the questions asked. I believe it is useless to wait for government to reverse its bureaucratic momentum, its regulatory fixation, its tendency to turn to socialistic solutions for all social ills. I believe we do better in the context of the freedom that same government guarantees us to educate the next generation of teachers, business persons, professionals and civil servants in the freedom-cherishing principles of private enterprise, the nobility of personal endeavor, the right of every individual to have an equal opportunity at life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness without undue resort to legislative constraints that mean the loss of individual freedom.

Again I remind you these answers are not answers to the questions—they are only motivating answers, a part of the "why I stand here" rationale.

5. My final answer is the conviction that Hardin-Simmons University is uniquely positioned to serve the decade immediately ahead in exactly the terms mentioned in the previous answers.

At this point I need to be more specific. I believe the years ahead are going to try institutions such as this as they never have been tried before. I believe the institutions that will survive will do so because they were better managed and more stubbornly believed in, whose stewards worked harder, worked more wisely, and worked with an unrelenting reliance on the transcendent reality of a God who cares about men and their nobler efforts.

Like the legendary cowboy who has become the namesake of this institution, I believe it is in a position to be lean enough and tough enough to do exactly that. I believe its financial structure, its faculty stability, its alumni support, and its sense of mission all but guarantee it.

I believe that it so close to having its master plan complete for facilities that nothing can stop it from moving into these crucial decades with the kind of plan that can be systematically maintained and periodically updated, and because of this, this institution is now able to launch a program for the

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Dr. Fletcher and student congress president Becky Bridges.

future built on an academic model related to the current realities in which it finds itself.

But finally, I believe Hardin-Simmons has established itself as an institution with a clear-cut sense of its Christian heritage and its Christian mission and with a validating record of faithfulness to that mission that allows it to honestly state that it is a Christian institution for higher education.

I began by indicating that such a moment as this involves antecedent optimism. I then asked if this optimism was well founded. Have the questions I recognized diminished it? Have the answers which motivate me justified it? Well, that is what history is all about. Today we formally begin a new chapter in the history of Hardin-Simmons University. □



Left to right Mrs. Bryce Jordan (nee Jonelle Thiberry, ex '51); Dr. Bryce Jordan (ex '42), president, University of Texas at Arlington and H-SU faculty member 1949-51; and Dr. Elwin L. Skiles, H-SU chancellor.




Dr. David Ray, left, chats with trustee Glen Burroughs and Dr. Clyde Childers, vice president for development, at inauguration. Ray has just resigned as assistant vice president for development to devote his full time to a preaching ministry.



Mrs. Ed Tapscott (nee Betty Stevens, BA '53, ME '55), and Dr. Ed Tapscott (BA '54, MA '55), vice president for academic affairs, Houston Baptist University.

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Editor: Richard Byrnes, Vice President for University Relations
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Secretary, University Relations: Lois Alexander

GENERAL OFFICES: Hardin-Simmons University Alumni Association, Sandifer Memorial Hall, Mailing address: Box K, H-SU Station, Abilene, Texas 79601.