

Chapter I

Introduction to John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy

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Until quite recently, John Albert Broadus (1827–1895), one of the most formative shapers of American Christianity in the nineteenth century, has been relegated to the realm of affectionate obscurity. His name is known to historians as a pioneer in theological education, a popular Baptist preacher, and a biblical scholar of note. He was also the second president of the first Baptist seminary in the South of which he was a founding faculty member. But such facts alone do not capture the heart of the man. Sadly, an entire century of several generations that “knew not John” has come and gone. Nearly 115 years after his death, it is time to revisit the legacy of John Albert Broadus, a titanic figure in the history of the evangelical church and a prince of the pulpit who, in his own day, “girdled the globe with his influence.”¹

¹ A statement by F. H. Kerfoot at a memorial service for Broadus held in Washington in connection with a meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. Quoted, A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1901), 438.

I myself first discovered the brooding presence of John Albert Broadus in 1979 when I moved to Louisville to teach at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Occasionally one of the older professors would mention Broadus in a chapel sermon or hallway conversation. Some of them had studied under teachers who had known Broadus personally. In those days the portraits of all the seminary presidents were mounted in a sitting area known as Broadus Lounge. All of the portraits were impressive, of course—Boyce the cavalier, Whitsitt the scholar, Mullins the visionary, Sampey the stalwart, Fuller the churchman, McCall the administrator—but Broadus’s portrait was somehow different. There was something pensive, wistful about the likeness it portrayed. One was drawn to Broadus—his gentle eyes, his humble demeanor, his noble bearing, his spiritual depth, his kindly countenance. Near his portrait was a plaque inscribed with the famous words Broadus had uttered in 1865 when it seemed that the Seminary would not be able to go on after its collapse at the end of the Civil War: “Suppose we quietly agree that the Seminary may die, but we’ll die first.”²

During my ten years on the faculty at Louisville, I would often take my students to Cave Hill Cemetery. Here, secluded in a beautiful glen, was a special burial plot where Broadus was laid to rest next to his friend James Petigru Boyce, near the graves of John R. Sampey, Basil Manly Jr., A. T. Robertson, and other great leaders of the school. Sometimes I would give lectures around the tombstones reminding the students of the admonition inscribed on the tomb of Governor William Bradford (1588–1657) at Plymouth, Massachusetts: *qua patres difficillime adepti sunt nolite turpiter relinquere*, “What our forefathers with so much difficulty secured, do not basely relinquish.” The students sometimes referred jokingly to these “séances” in the graveyard, as such field trips were called, but they always came away with a deeper appreciation for the great saints buried there and the debt we owed to them all.

² John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce, DD., LL.D.* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 200.

But who was John A. Broadus? He was born on January 24, 1827, in Culpepper County, Virginia, some two weeks after Boyce, his future life partner in theological education, was born in Charleston, South Carolina. Unlike the latter, Broadus did not come from a wealthy family of grandees but rather from one of moderate means. Yet the Broaduses of Virginia were well-known for their integrity and great usefulness in public and religious life. His father, Major Edmund Broadus, had served in the Virginia legislature, and his great-uncle, Andrew Broaddus (spelled with two *d*'s) was a noted evangelist and orator of his day. Converted at a revival meeting, John A. Broadus was baptized at age 16 and called to preach several years later under the ministry of A. M. Poindexter.

In 1850 Broadus was called to be the pastor of the Charlottesville Baptist Church, one of the largest Baptist congregations in Virginia at this time. He also began to teach that year at his alma mater, the University of Virginia. During the next decade, Broadus became widely known throughout the Old Dominion and beyond both as a preacher and a scholar. In 1851 Broadus was invited to preach on a special occasion at the First Baptist Church of Richmond. One person who heard his sermon that day described the effect of his preaching: "No gush, no attempt at mannerism or display of learning; it was the pure gospel in simple, earnest, well-chosen diction and impressively delivered." This same person later said about Broadus that "he never allowed his reputation to outrun his ability or his merit."³ William E. Hatcher, who would become a famous pastor himself, was a student at Richmond College when he first heard Broadus preach in 1857. His sermons were marked, Hatcher said, by "refined piety and the emotion of the Holy Spirit."⁴ Clearly there was something both winsome and compelling about Broadus the preacher. It is not surprising that Broadus became such a popular preacher among the Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. Stonewall Jackson invited

³ *Life and Letters*, 92.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

him to address his troops in northern Virginia, and on one occasion Broadus preached to more than 5,000 men in the army of Robert E. Lee.

Andover Theological Seminary was established in 1807, the first such institution in America. Baptists entered the field of advanced theological education with the founding of Newton Theological Institute in 1825. Ten years later Basil Manly Sr. issued the first serious call for the establishment of a similar institution among Baptists in the South. This idea was debated vigorously among Baptist leaders in the South leading up to the opening of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859. Broadus himself did not at first think well of the idea and published an article expressing his dissent in the *Religious Herald*. However, his developing friendship with James P. Boyce, together with the assignment he was given to develop a curricular plan for the new school, won out over his earlier objections. When Broadus was asked to join Boyce and two others on the seminary's first faculty, he faced a great dilemma. Perhaps the most difficult decision of Broadus's career was to leave his flourishing pastoral work in Charlottesville, and his teaching responsibilities at the University of Virginia that he loved so much, to accept the call to the fledgling new school in South Carolina. After much prayer and wavering, however, the decision was made and Broadus wrote to Boyce—*iacta est alea*, "The die is cast." In this commitment John Albert Broadus had found his life's work.

Broadus was a convinced Baptist and wrote prolifically on behalf of Baptist distinctives such as believers' baptism, religious liberty, and congregational polity. But he did so with a generous spirit and a breadth of wisdom not often found in the denominational apologetics of the era. As a young man in Virginia, Broadus married the daughter of a Methodist teacher and preached his first sermon in a Presbyterian pulpit. More than any other Southern Baptist leader of the nineteenth century, Broadus's appeal extended beyond the bounds of his own region and denomination. Brooks E. Holifield was right to include Broadus

in his study of “the gentlemen theologians” who shaped the orthodox Southern religious mind in the decades leading up to the Civil War. But Broadus was also a luminal figure who bridged the polarities of North and South, rural and urban, elite culture and popular religion in the emerging evangelical consensus of the late nineteenth century. Broadus and Henry Drummond shared the same platform at D. L. Moody’s Northfield Conference, and his correspondents included the likes of Philip Schaff, B. F. Westcott, and John R. Mott. The invitation Broadus received to deliver the influential Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale Divinity School in 1889 is a mark of the national stature he had attained in his mature years.

Broadus is rightly remembered as a master of the pulpit and a great teacher of homiletics. His enduring classic, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, which originated in lectures he gave to one blind student, has been a guide to generations of aspiring preachers and still remains in print! His facility with classical languages prepared him to write a major commentary on the Gospel of Matthew and to serve as an editor of the homilies of John Chrysostom in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series.

Still, Broadus’s high scholarly attainments did nothing to diminish his passion for communicating the content of the Christian faith to all of God’s people, including the children of the church. He was a great fan of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, whom he heard preach on several occasions. Like the great London pastor, he supported the use of catechisms in the religious instruction of children. When the Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources) was organized in 1891, the first publication projected was *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* by John A. Broadus. Several years ago while I was serving as the interim pastor of a Baptist congregation in Birmingham, one of the elderly members in the church presented me with a first-edition copy of Broadus’s catechism. It was worn with age and torn along the edges from many years of storage in her attic trunk. Her grandmother, she said, had used

this catechism to acquaint her with the rudiments of the Christian faith many years before. We began a series of lessons in basic Christian doctrine organized around the questions and answers of Broadus's classic document. More than 100 years after Broadus's catechism first appeared in 1892, the clarity and power of its simple yet profound presentation of the gospel were still bearing fruit among the people of God called Baptists.

The time is long overdue for a modern critical biography of John Albert Broadus. The essays in this volume do not meet that need, nor do they cover in a comprehensive way every important aspect of Broadus's life and work. However, they do present fresh perspectives and new interpretations of one of the most important figures in Southern Baptist history. David S. Dockery, president of Union University and coeditor of this volume with Roger D. Duke, opens the volume with an overview of the lives of Broadus and his son-in-law, A. T. Robertson. Robertson is the greatest New Testament scholar Southern Baptists have ever produced, and his famous mega-grammar of New Testament Greek is a legendary volume in its own right. Dockery argues that the legacies of Broadus and Robertson should be seen as together constituting a discrete tradition of biblical scholarship in the service of the church. Some of the fruits of this tradition may be glimpsed in the pulpit work of the expositional preachers Herschel H. Hobbs and W. A. Criswell. Both were students of Robertson, and both served as major leaders among Southern Baptists in the second half of the twentieth century.

A. James Fuller is a careful historian of American Christianity who has earlier written a distinguished biography of Basil Manly Sr. In his chapter, "The Way to Learn to Preach Is to Preach": John A. Broadus's Early Career and Influence," Fuller shows us how Broadus's early training and experience as a young preacher in Virginia shaped his later career and ministry. Broadus's conversion and call to the ministry were confirmed through his preaching experiences in various settings: at protracted meetings, in concerts of prayer, and his extemporaneous

speaking to slaves and later to soldiers during the Civil War. These experiences, together with his superb academic training at the University of Virginia, laid the foundation for Broadus's future greatness.

Roger D. Duke, coeditor with David S. Dockery of this volume, presents a textured study of Broadus as a classicist and exemplar of rhetoric in the work of preaching. Using Broadus's *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* as the basis of his analysis, Duke shows how Broadus knew the categories of classical rhetoric (invention, arrangement, elocution, delivery, and memory) and intentionally adapted this paradigm for the task of proclamation. Of special interest here is the discussion of Broadus as an extemporaneous preacher, an approach which, as V. S. Stanfield once observed, made "each person in the audience feel that he was talking directly to him." In Duke's analysis Broadus comes across as a masterful communicator with great persuasive ability yet one who never allowed substance to be seduced by style.

In "New Wine in Broadus Wine Skins?" Rick Melick, a theological educator and New Testament scholar of note himself, poses the question, "How would Broadus fare in today's world of biblical scholarship?" Working primarily from Broadus's noted commentary on Matthew in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, as well as his classic textbook on homiletics, Melick looks carefully at Broadus's use of the original languages of Scripture, his understanding of the authority of the biblical text, as well as his engagement with issues of textual criticism, biblical introduction, and exegesis. Melick also reviews how Broadus used rules of interpretation (hermeneutics) in his exposition of the Bible. Broadus emerges here as a prescient scholar of Scripture, often anticipating future trends and developments in biblical studies while ever resisting trajectories of destructive biblical criticism.

Craig C. Christina, who embodies the Broadus tradition as a pastor and scholar of preaching, explores the critical role Broadus played in the establishment of Southern Seminary. At

every crisis the Seminary faced in its early history, he was indispensable in helping the struggling institution to overcome difficulties and establish firm foundations for the future. Christina traces Broadus's role in that formative period of the Seminary's life—from the debacle of the Civil War, through the financial panic of 1873, amidst the rigors of Reconstruction, through the difficult relocation from Greenville to Louisville, in the turmoil of the Toy Controversy, and the grief occasioned by the death of Boyce.

Boyce assumed the title of president only during his final year. Until then he was officially the chairman of the faculty, though Broadus became the Seminary's second "president" upon the death of Boyce, in many ways he continued to function more as the leader of a team than a company executive. Though clearly recognized by everyone as *primus inter pares*, he fostered a strong sense of collegiality and served as a personal mentor to the younger men on the faculty. Inscribed on the tomb of Boyce at Cave Hill Cemetery are Broadus's words of endearment to his "best and dearest friend" and this expression of his hopes for the future of the Seminary to which he, no less than Boyce, had devoted his life: "And may the men be always ready, as the years come and go, to carry on, with widening reach and heightened power, the work we sought to do, and did begin!"⁵

Mark M. Overstreet's chapter on Broadus's "lost" Yale lectures recounts his discovery of 193 pages of Broadus's handwritten notes, which fills an important gap in our knowledge about the 1889 Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching. Heretofore, Broadus's talks at Yale had been known from religious periodicals and summaries provided by reporters in the press of the day. Overstreet analyzes his contribution to homiletics by reviewing the recently discovered notes in light of the preaching program set forth in *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. The content of Broadus's Beecher Lectures reveals a practical theologian at work dealing with the kinds of issues faced by every preacher every Sunday in the pulpit. Overstreet concludes

⁵ Broadus, *Memoirs of Boyce*, 371.

that Broadus's performance in Marquand Chapel shows how the principles he had set forth with such clarity some twenty years earlier in the first edition of his classic homiletics textbook were confirmed and reinforced on this occasion.

Tom J. Nettles begins his discussion of *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* by recounting how Broadus was recently misused as the butt of an anecdote in a popular book on preaching. However, a careful reading of Broadus's discussion of preaching, not to say an honest review of his life and labors, would easily give the lie to anyone who claimed that such a great Scripture scholar and master of the pulpit would deliberately twist a text of the Bible in the way claimed. On the other hand, Nettles shows us a portrait of Broadus the preacher as he really was—ever concerned to be faithful to the text, aware of the special needs of the audience addressed, and mindful of the holy task assumed as a herald of God's good news. Nettles does a superb job of placing Broadus's great book in the context of his times, examining contemporary reviews, and also the continuing appeal this volume continues to have in the field of homiletics. Nettles also points out the close connection Broadus made between the character of the preacher and the message he proclaimed. Broadus himself emphasized the co-inherence of both in the closing words of his book:

Nor must we e'er forget the power of character and life to reinforce speech. What a preacher is goes far to determine the effect of what he says. There is a saying of Augustine, *cuius vita fulgor; eius verba tonitrua*—if a man's life be lightning, his words are thunders.

Beecher L. Johnson takes an in-depth look at what might be called today Broadus's preaching style in his chapter, "How to Preach Marketable Messages without Selling out the Savior: Broadus on the Role of Sensationalism in Preaching." Johnson defines sensational preaching as "using any means to gain the ear of, or have an effect on, the audience that does not honor the sacred nature of God and the things of God or ensure singular

focus on the spiritual and theological message of God in the text.” It is not difficult to find numerous examples of sensational preaching defined as such in the evangelical church of today. Broadus, however, regarded such techniques as a form of peddling the gospel, and he had no sympathy for them. It is one thing to have one’s “fancy charmed” by a sermon and quite another to be moved by the Spirit in response to the clear delineation of gospel truth. At the same time, while Broadus repudiated anything that smacked of gimmickry or showmanship in the pulpit, he never used this principle as an excuse for preaching dull, boring sermons. While I hope every chapter of this book will be read and digested carefully, this one should be made required reading for every course in homiletics!

James Patterson is a distinguished historian and professor of Christian studies at Union University. In his concluding chapter to this volume, “Broadus’s Living Legacy,” Patterson provides a good summary of the themes presented in the earlier essays. He shows how Broadus casts a long shadow across Southern Baptist life in his roles as theological educator, denominational statesman, biblical scholar, and advocate of faithful expository preaching. Patterson also develops a theme not fully explored in earlier essays but one with continuing relevance today: Broadus as defender of biblical orthodoxy. While always embracing a humble and irenic spirit, Broadus was well aware of the spiritual and theological erosion inherent in liberal theology. While still a pastor in Charlottesville, Broadus had baptized Crawford Howell Toy and later befriended and encouraged the younger scholar as a junior member of the faculty. Yet Broadus stood solidly with Boyce when Toy’s acceptance of destructive biblical criticism forced his departure from the Seminary. Patterson also rightly presents Broadus as standing squarely within the Reformed tradition, embracing the kind of missions-minded evangelical Calvinism of Andrew Fuller, William Carey, and Charles H. Spurgeon. Broadus avoided the extremes of hyper-Calvinism on the one hand and a pelagianizing decisionism on the other. He thus remains a good model for Baptists today

who seek in faithfulness to Scripture to stress both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in proclaiming the glories of God's grace.

When John Albert Broadus died in 1895, tributes came streaming in from around the world. One of those who spoke at his funeral was P. S. Henson of Chicago who, as a young man, had first heard the great preacher in Virginia many years before. The words Henson offered in Louisville's Walnut Street Baptist Church that day still ring true today:

He is gone, but his light is not out. There are stars so far away that if they were blotted out they would still shine on for a hundred years. So will Broadus continue to shine. He will live in your hearts and in other hearts all over the world. When Moses died the people wept, and well they might, for there was but one Moses. But lo! Joshua comes, and the walls of Jericho fall down, and the Promised Land becomes the heritage of God's people. Elijah is taken up, but his mantle falls on Elisha. So God's work goes on.⁶

⁶ *Life and Letters*, 436.