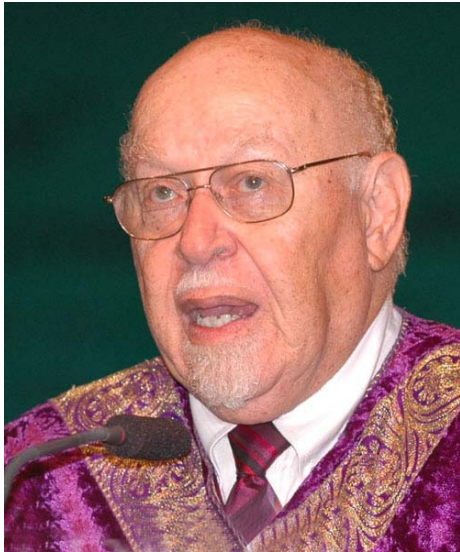


GENERAL BOARD ANNIVERSARY REFLECTIONS

By

Bishop John Hurst Adams



Bishop John Hurst Adams

Thank you very much Bishop Cousin, and to Bishop Chappelle, my commendation, my brother, for allowing this noon time for a few history lessons.

Bishops of the Church, General Officers, Members of the General Board, Brothers and Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen, Sons and Daughters of Allen, good afternoon:

I want to say first of all that the African Methodist

Episcopal Church had a long and storied history before

1956. I do not want our celebration of the reforms which took place at that time to think that that was the beginning of the world. We had a long and beautiful history before then, and all of the functions which are performed now were performed then but in a different way. In order to really understand the General Board and the subject which I must address, the General Board of our Education, you have to understand the context in which they were created. The Brotherhood movement, uh—and you can see a lot of the leadership if you have the little slip of paper that Bishop Cousin has prepared, their names at the bottom are called At-large Members of the General Board. And the key leadership of the Brotherhood movement is listed there, and some of us, as secondary members of the General Board, were not on there. We were conspirators without visibility. But it was a major effort to reform the church, and if my memory serves me

right, it had the following intentions to submit and have the African Methodist Episcopal Church operate on an inclusive General Budget. To connectionalize fiscal policy in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and bring accountability to the management of the money in the Church. To stop and correct abuses which were occurring both with finance and personnel by some of the bishops in the church. Yes, I have the right to talk about us, too. It passed legislation creating the General Board to fulfill the goals which it had established. And as a secondary matter, created a General Board of Higher Education in order to oversee the educational institutions in our church and the other functions of education were deferred to Commissions of the General Board. The final purpose was to democratize the oversight of money in the church by expanding a participation of those who made the decisions to equal representation on the General Board—two (2) clergy, two (2) lay originally, and later on, as Valerie so clearly explained, a youth delegate, I was added, I believe, in 1972. These were the purposes of the Brotherhood movement, and the Brotherhood movement submitted legislation to the General Conference to accomplish these goals. It was a radical surprise, to most of us who sponsored this, that we had such widespread support. But the General Budget and the accompanying General Board and all of the other goals which were submitted into legislation were overwhelmingly passed despite the opposition of most of the bishops of the church. What were its missions? To connectionalize—and I keep saying that word because I see the sense of connection being diminished in the life of our church—but to connectionalize the oversighting of money and program in the life of the church. To bring accountability not only for money—and I hope we will expand our understanding of the word accountability, that accountability refers to anything you are authorized to do you are accountable to the people who authorized you to do it—and so we are accountable for our prerogatives, our authorities, our performance, as well as

our money. Improve the quality of our schools, to assist our schools in the accreditation process and to assist our schools in building development capacity and to do something we did then but which has been now given the fantasy name of institutional effectiveness. And for those of you who do not play around with the educational jargon, let me just explain that it aint that complicated. Institutional effectiveness is you evaluate it, you recommend what you ought to do to improve it, you implement the recommendation, then you start the process over again and you repeat it, and repeat it, and repeat it, hoping every time you repeat it your institution performs a little better. So, the General Board of Higher Education was created, and Christian Education and the other educational functions were put under the supervision of a Commission of the General Board. But, a General Board of Higher Education was created and represented by one (1) person elected from each Episcopal District and two or three positions at-large. Now you all need to understand the politics of the church. The at-large positions were created so that the radicals who started this could get elected to something. There was no way Ralph Jackson or Ezra Johnson, or Edward Lamb or McCoy Ransom could get elected to anything, anywhere, any bishop presided over the meeting. So the at-large positions were created from the floor of the General Conference so that these brothers could have their places. And so the—now let me show you how visionary this is all about, because I want to give Ralph and Ezra and all those credit. They did all that fancy rebel rousing, and Ralph and a couple of others who were truly charismatic personalities, but they were going to get the rest of us in the back room and pick our brains until there was nothing left. And they would take our stuff and put it in their own stuff line of words and sell their product. So, destruction. I said context, mission, not structure. Listen, there was a General Board of Higher Education. There was at that time an office, General Officer called the Secretary of Education, and a subsidiary of the

Board of Higher Education called the Executive Commission of Higher Education. The General Board of Higher Education was made up of churchmen and churchwomen from the Districts. The Executive Commission was made up of selected professional educators who were also members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. So you had a structure of church representation, an officer responsible for the administration of education, and an executive commission composed of professional educators to assist the schools in the technology of running an institution. So that was the structure. The process, the Executive Commission was authorized to annually review the operation of every one of our institutions of higher education. And since in 1956 I was also elected President of Paul Quinn College, a visit from the Executive Commission was just like a visit from the Accrediting Association. They looked under the bed, they looked at everything the institution was doing. So this annual review of educational institutions based on Best practices. They looked at governance. The fact that many of our institutions are no longer composed only of AME's elected by our Annual Conferences started here with recommendation from the Executive Commission that we needed to have on our Boards people with wisdom, wealth, or at least access to wisdom and wealth. They reviewed administration and many of us, like me, I was educated when I was elected President of Paul Quinn College. I became an educator when I learned how to be President of Paul Quinn College. So there's a difference between being educated and being an educator. And we thank you for the process. They reviewed academic life, they reviewed student life, they looked at your facilities and how well you kept them, they looked at your financial information and management systems, and they looked at the religious life on the campuses of African Methodist Episcopal Colleges, which frequently had less religion on them than the state universities down the street. They reviewed the resources, the property. Do we really know how wealthy we are in property

assets? Do we have anywhere a tabulation of the total value of the properties in the name of the African Methodist Episcopal Church? And if you expanded that to include the properties of people who are members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, you would have an astronomical leveraging number to dance with the big bucks. We have assets in endowments. We have assets in money. We have remarkable assets in personnel. All of the educators put on the Executive Committee were members of the AME Church, and they were PhD's from all of the country, all kinds of universities and schools. In our Church there is a reservoir of talent which we had better soon learn how to use more effectively. One of our greatest assets is our fabulous history. Daniel Alexander Payne bought Wilberforce with no money and it is the lynch pen of black higher education in America. I chastised so distinguished the Leroine Bennett when he listed the 50 most important Black people in American History and left Daniel Alexander Payne off the list, and I called him and cursed him out. How dare you leave the Father of Higher Education in this country for Black folks out of the list of the 50 most important folk in our History. He apologized. I said yea, but that does not correct your record. Our other great asset and resource is our mission, and I really—Bishop may I take a moment. You gave me a time limit and I have exceeded it, but this is getting good to me now. We need to remember our mission. Our schools were created because our children had nowhere else to go. Let me tell you that mission is still valid. The young people who are victims of poverty and living in the dangers of the hood, need a place to go to college. The young people who can't make a 1200 or 1400 on the SAT test need a place to go to school. And it is the mission of the Church to meet the needs of the needy and not the needs of the elite. And so we have a powerful mission. You know I like the way Bishop Beard use to say it about Morris Brown, "Spellman and Morehouse were

given to us by rich white folks. We put Morris Brown together for ourselves.” And, if for no other reason than our integrity as a people, we got to find a way to save Morris Brown.

Now let me do three things real quick and I will sit down, but you get a—I went to a Black school, I taught at a Black school, I was President of a Black school, and I have been Chairman of the Board of seven of them. So you know you put me up to talk about Black Higher Education, you opened up an encyclopedia which may not ever close.

There were some negatives. I was talking to somebody about the candidate for President who spoke last night and I said wonderful, but I said I like Clinton. He said oh you can't like Clinton, Clinton was flawed. I said so was everybody else I know. There were flaws, there were negatives. One was the Executive Commission on Higher Education got a little “heady” and began to overreach and began to offend the presidents and board chairs in the various schools. Yes! So it isn't bad to have power, but it is bad not to know how to use it. Secondly, this made for growing resistance from the colleges and Episcopal Districts in which the school set, and what we need to understand that most of these schools are owned by an Annual Conference or an Episcopal District, not by the connection, till this day. And because this new creation, the General Board of Higher Education and the Executive Commission, could not deliver a quick and easy fix to a long and hard problem, we grew impatient and decided before it had time to really work to cut it off and eliminate it to the great harm of higher education in our church. But the Executive Commission and the General Board of Higher Education and the General Secretary of Education brought external professional assistance to our schools that was invaluable. I know that in my first few years as a President of the College, my ability to call

somebody who had years of experience and people who were professionals in the field of higher education and talk about showing me how to deal with stuff that I had never heard of before was a very valuable resource. The visionary recommendations of governance and financial management and endowment building and how do you separate policy from administration. That's a big issue with Black Church sponsored schools, it is not an issue with church sponsored white schools. The Archbishop of Washington fired a faculty member at Catholic University and the Accrediting Agency didn't open its mouth. You let an AME Bishop walk across an AME Campus too many times in one week and some snitch on the faculty will call SACS and say the Bishop is interfering in our work. We are frequently, as I heard earlier, our own worse enemy. And so, the Church decided to eliminate all of this. It cut out the secretary ship of education, it cut out the General Board of Higher Education and submitted it to a Commission of the General Board, it eliminated the Executive Commission on Higher Education, and I think we were too impatient and those premature executions were done before we had done a full DNA exam, and I hope that in the reconfiguration of our vision of education for the African Methodist Episcopal Church those same capacities can be reinvented in some way so that that can help us attain authentic excellence in higher education.