

WILLIAM WALLACE FINLATOR

A voice crying in the wilderness is often heard from a safe distance. For over fifty years William Finlator's voice has been heard in this state not from afar but insistently close, proclaiming those principles of freedom from racial and economic injustice, opposition to war, and separation of church and state which have been at the heart of the message he has felt impelled to preach.

A native of Louisburg and a graduate of Wake Forest and of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky, William Finlator has held pastorates at churches in a number of towns in this state, most notably for twenty-six years at the Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh. Throughout the nineteen sixties and seventies and into this decade his presence has been felt in a variety of urgent causes, from peace marches at the Pentagon to chairmanship of the North Carolina Advisory Commission on Civil Rights to testimony before the United States Senate Judiciary Committee in opposition to the use of public school facilities for religious meetings. In 1981 he spearheaded through the national Southern Baptist Convention meeting a resolution opposing interference in religion by the government and interference in government by religious groups. He has served as Vice President of both Southerners for Economic Justice and the American Civil Liberties Union, and in 1980 received the Frank Porter Graham Award from the North Carolina branch of the latter body.

In a foreword to a biographical study of William Finlator published two years ago, President Emeritus Friday wrote that "Bill Finlator has disturbed a good number of citizens, encouraged many, motivated hundreds, and made us all more sensitive to our personal obligation to establish a better and more peaceful world." Those activities -- disturbing, encouraging, motivating, and sensitizing -- are indeed the functions of a prophet; and it is the voice of this prophet, heard to such effect throughout our region, that we recognize today with this degree of Doctor of Divinity.