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FINAL WRAPUP

Conference Seeks Solutions
To Church's Role In Crisis

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By Jim Newton

CHICAGO (BP)--A Southern Baptist conference on "The Church's Role in the National Crisis" ended on a note of optimism here, with speaker after speaker indicating that there is hope that the Southern Baptist Convention can play a creative role in finding solutions.

The pastors of six churches shared with 250 Baptist leaders what their congregations are trying to do to find solutions to some of the problems that plague the nation. Each one indicated there is hope, but it is a struggle.

How the church can minister with integrity and honesty to youth separated from many Southern Baptists by a generation gap, and to Negroes, separated by a color and cultural barrier, seemed to be the major question confronting the conference.

Significantly, the conference sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission was held at the University of Chicago campus in the midst of a ghetto where Black people have demonstrated alienation from white society; and where students recently demonstrated the intensity of the generation gap.

Two students told the conference of their own experience with the generation gap, and one of the nation's most influential Black leaders spoke of the problem of racism.

Jesse Jackson, 27-year-old director of Operation Breadbasket for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and a Baptist preacher, told the group that they must deal with the problem of racism in the white church.

"You've got a crisis in your church," said Jackson, who was pictured the same week by Time magazine as one of the five top black leaders in the country. "Some of you are going to have to deal with that (racism) at the Judgment Bar."

He started his 45-minute address by telling the group, "I know you cats. I wish I could have joined one of your Southern Baptist churches back in South Carolina. But I couldn't have even walked in the door if I weren't a janitor or didn't want to get kicked out or maybe arrested."

Jackson said that the church must follow the example of Jesus, who sought out the oppressed and downtrodden and was kicked out of the traditional church because he ministered to outcasts.

The contrast between the neatly dressed Baptist leaders meeting in the University's modern Center for Continuing Education, and some of the long-haired students on the campus illustrated the extent of the generation gap.

During a discussion period on the generation gap, a student at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Okla., Miss Janis Glass, said that the gap was not really between young people and God, but rather between youth and the church.

She recounted her own quest to find relevancy in a Southern Baptist church, saying that she finds her own spiritual renewal in a Catholic church where she sits on the floor with other Christians, sings relevant songs to guitar and engages in brutally honest discussion on the critical issues of the Christian life.

"Why don't we have this in our Southern Baptist churches?" she asked. "Why can't we be honest in the church?"

To both the problems of racism and the generation gap, a half dozen speakers or more offered solutions and told of specific Baptist churches that are earnestly seeking to minister to youth and to Negro people with integrity.

The pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago, John Fry, told of his church's efforts to minister to the black ghetto area of South Side Chicago only six blocks from the university, and said that because his church has sought to help the downtrodden, it has begun to suffer the indignities that are heaped upon outcasts.

He said his church was trying to play the role of prophet by speaking in behalf of those so lowly that they cannot be heard with justice. He said there were 105,000 people in the south side ghetto who "have no standing and voice in this corrupt and perverse city."

Fry told of his church's deep involvement in political action from the precinct level up. He said the church even had a banner campaigning for one candidate spread across the bell tower. In a discussion period, he said the church was hoping to "knock off Mayor (Richard) Daley in 1971."

He added that it is impossible to take political action without taking sides. Fry said that he and his church had decided to take the side of the oppressed people of the ghetto, and the side of a street gang called the Blackstone Rangers who have "brought peace and order to the area."

"Christ surely is not a part of the contemporary oppressive system or among the club swingers or city politicians who allow clubs to be swung, but Christ is among those upon whom clubs are swung," Fry said.

He told of his church's efforts to help the people by throwing open the church facilities to them for their meetings, by political action, by providing attorneys and financial support to help the people, by a program called "Big Sisters-Little Sisters" to help adolescent girls who have no homes, by participation in War on Poverty programs, and by working with poverty-stricken children in the area of education and cultural development.

A Southern Baptist pastor of an integrated church, John Nichol of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., shared his experiences in trying to minister to a community that has been changing from white to black.

Nichol said the Oakhurst church in an Atlanta suburb decided to remain in the area and try to minister to the whole community, and that the decision not to move was made on the basis of the church's understanding of the biblical revelation and their identity as a part of the body of Christ.

In order to maintain its integrity, the church must be willing to risk failure in the minds of others, added Nichol. He cited a need to adopt biblical standards of success instead of cultural, material and statistical standards.

Another Baptist pastor, Brooks Ramsey of Second Baptist Church in Memphis, shared in the closing address his personal experience as pastor of a church that has struggled with the racial question.

Ramsey told of efforts to fire him as pastor because of his views on the race issue, his participation in the march to city hall following the death of Martin Luther King Jr., and his sermons on the racial question. Instead of firing the pastor, however, the church voted to fire the deacons and elect a new slate of leaders more responsive to the pastor's leadership.

Ramsey said that the major thing that the church must seek is integrity to the truth of God.

He urged those attending the conference to return to their churches and enforce upon people who cry out against the "social gospel" that "there is no real gospel that does not have its binding social imperatives... Let us tell them that lovingly but fearlessly."

In another major address, the president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Gordon Clinard of San Angelo, Tex., called for a proper balance between evangelism and social ethics.

Clinard, pastor of First Baptist Church in San Angelo, Tex., said that all major and effective evangelistic efforts throughout history involved social reforms.

In another major address, Jack Noffsinger, pastor of Knollwood Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., told of at least eight churches that were using different methods to try to bridge the generation gap, but added that he frankly doubted that many Baptist churches were much concerned with bridging this gap.

"Churches which are at least attempting to involve their people in social concerns and social action are more likely to communicate with and involve the thinking young," said Noffsinger, adding that if the church only talks and never acts, youth are likely to drop out.

Another major speaker, political science professor Daniel R. Grant of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, said that youth make a strategic mistake when they leave the church to "go where the action is", for change will never come in the church unless they stay within the structure and seek change from within the local church.

Findley B. Edge, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, seemed to sum up the spirit of the conference in saying he felt Southern Baptists are standing on the threshold of hope. "True, we have a long way to go..., but we're moving," he said.

A Baptist pastor, who did not identify himself, stood up at the close of the discussion of the generation gap issue, and said he would like to answer Miss Glass' question why Baptists can't be honest with youth.

"It's because of birds like me," he confessed. "By God, I just haven't been honest. I've been afraid to run aground with the established people. But come hell or high water, I'm going home to try to lead my young people to do their thing, and I'm going to try to do my thing with complete honesty."

A Baptist layman responded in the discussion, "I think pastors are afraid of us laymen. Don't be," he urged. "Talk to us. Lead us. We're much further along than most of you pastors think, and we'll follow if you lead."

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SBC Cooperative Program
Gifts Decrease in March

(4-4-69)

NASHVILLE (BP)--Missions giving through the Southern Convention's Cooperative Program unified budget for the first quarter of 1969 increased by nearly six per cent over first quarter gifts of 1968, despite a nearly five per cent decrease during the month of March, the SBC Executive Committee reported here.

During the first three months of 1969, a total of \$6,985,208 went to SBC missions causes through the national Cooperative Program, an increase of \$393,419 or 5.97 per cent over Cooperative Program contributions during the first quarter of 1968.

Total missions gifts, both Cooperative Program and designated contributions to specific causes, for the quarter totalled \$21,243,708, up \$1,322,852 or 6.64 per cent when compared to first quarter gifts of 1968.

During the month of March, Cooperative Program gifts were \$2,003,518, a 4.94 per cent decrease when compared to Cooperative Program giving for March of 1968.

John H. Williams, financial planning secretary for the SBC Executive Committee which prepared the report, pointed out that the \$393,419 Cooperative Program increase for 1969 was somewhat deceiving, however, because it includes at least \$200,000 or more which probably should have come in during the previous year.

Williams said that when you compare the four-month period of December 1968 through March of 1968 to the same four months in 1967-68, Cooperative Program contributions are just barely keeping pace, since it would be an increase of only .29 per cent. The contributing factor is a 16 per cent decrease during the month of December, 1968.

March gifts, which actually decreased 4.94 per cent compared to March of 1968, caused the Cooperative Program picture to look even worse than it was at the end of February, when the three month period (December-February) showed a 1.92 per cent increase.

On the quarterly basis, January-March, designated gifts increased by 6.97 per cent or \$929,432 to a total of \$14,258,499, the report indicated. Most of that amount included gifts to the SBC Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions.

The SBC Foreign Mission Board has received \$17.6 million of the \$21.2 million grand total during the first quarter of 1969 in both designated and Cooperative Program gifts. The SBC Home Mission Board has received \$1½ million of the total.

Gifts reported in the quarterly financial statement reflect amounts given only to nation-wide Southern Baptist mission causes, and do not include amounts given to state and local Baptist mission causes.

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