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Baptists Rebuke For Silence
On National Moral Problems

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by Beth Hayworth

WASHINGTON (BP)--The 13th annual Religious Liberty Conference concluded its three-day study here with reports and debates that rebuked Baptists for being silent on such things as changing abortion laws, the need for responsible dissent and the right of a citizen to object to a particular war on grounds of conscience.

The 100 participants, coming from seven Baptist bodies, urged Baptists to do a better job with programs on family planning and sex education, to inform constituents on the alternatives to military service and to study the various implications involved in guaranteeing an annual income to all families.

One section of the conference also called on Baptists to work for educational reforms in both public and private schools, especially giving more aid to the disadvantaged and providing equality of educational opportunity for all students.

The findings of the conference are advisory only. The opinions and recommendations will be presented to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs at its semi-annual meeting in October. Any action taken then will be referred to the eight Baptist groups that make up the Baptist Joint Committee.

This year's conference theme was "Emerging Patterns of Rights and Responsibilities Affecting Church and State." The conferees worked in one of five sections to produce suggested principles and guidelines concerning family planning, selective conscientious objection, dissent, improving education and factors involved in assuring families of a minimum income.

Baptist churches have a responsibility to provide Christian educational programs in such areas as "marriage counseling, family guidance and sex education," according to the report of the group studying the family.

These programs should provide "adequate scientific information and Christian interpretation and motivation" and may be carried out "in cooperation with other churches, community groups or government agencies..." the report stated.

It also emphasized that churches should take an active part in securing legislation concerning the total welfare of families.

The silence of Baptists concerning legislative efforts to change abortion laws was charged by an attorney and former legislator from South Carolina and a housewife and mother from Arlington, Va.

Preston Callison from Columbia, S.C., said that last year when abortion legislation was discussed in the South Carolina legislature, "Baptists were peculiarly silent on the issue."

Mrs. Ross Shearer, also a Southern Baptist, said the report should be "a call to action...for the denomination to study and speak out on this hush-hush subject."

In its reference to changing abortion laws, the report said legislators should take into account "medical and genetic, psychological, social and economic, ethical and religious factors..." When legislative action has identified specific conditions under which abortion may be permissible, the final decision should rest with the families involved, the report stated.

The responsibility of the church to work to safeguard the rights of the conscientious objector received strong endorsement from the group studying the defense establishment and the rights of citizens.

"Baptists' historic appreciation for the role of conscience in social and personal decisions should be reaffirmed in acknowledging the right of dissent of those who object to all wars and those opposed to a particular war," they agreed.

The group urged that denominational agencies frame resolutions and distribute them widely to legislators expressing opposition to the harshness of the present treatment of selective objectors, support a provision for alternative military service, and call for abolition of the peace-time draft.

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Other recommendations included the following:

* Church groups and denominational agencies should inform their people through every available channel concerning the political, social and economic problems leading toward Christian citizenship responsibility, such as war, the free conscience of the objector, political dialogue, and participating in government policy-making decisions.

* "Church members, pastors and other leaders should inform themselves of the options available to young men facing the draft in order to provide effective counsel to those seeking guidance, both with reference to participation or non-participation in military service.

* "Church groups and denominational agencies should plan and implement studies on the social and theological bases of the problem.

* "The church should create and maintain a climate of freedom for individual conscience regardless of the person's persuasion or draft classification, and offer personal support and pastoral concern in relation to the hostile climate of public opinion."

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Conference Urges Baptists
To Support School Reforms

8/11/69

WASHINGTON (BP)--A hundred Baptist leaders from seven denominations concluded a three-day conference hearing a report that hit hard on the reluctance of Baptists and other Christians bodies to work for educational reforms in both public and private schools.

The criticism and specific recommendations for the denomination's role in improving education were in a report made on the final day of the 13th annual Religious Liberty Conference. The conference studying "emerging patterns of Rights and Responsibilities affecting Church and State" was sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The findings of the conference and the opinions stated in the reports are advisory only and in no way are binding on the denominations. The reports will be presented to the Baptist Joint Committee at its semi-annual meeting in October. Any action taken then will be referred to the eight Baptist bodies which make up the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The report on "improvement of education, the nation's crucial problem," was one of five made to the conference. The others related to conscientious objection, family planning dissent, and assuring families of a minimum income.

The section report on education stated that "it is past time," for Baptists "to join hands with progressive force to lead the way to educational reform."

"Baptists, along with other Christian bodies, have too frequently reacted violently against any attempt by governmental or private organizations to reverse with cycle of social decline which our communities and our citizenry face, particularly minority-group citizens," the education study group charged.

"We have allied ourselves too frequently with the reactionary elements and have thereby reneged on our opportunity to provide Christian leadership..." they continued.

The following recommendations were urged by the Baptist leaders as ways the denominations can help cope with the "disgrace resulting from the mass of uneducated and undereducated persons in our society:"

* "Openly and forcefully" support present programs of aiding the disadvantaged.

* "Serve as a public agent" in helping implement special educational efforts such as tutorial programs and the Head Start program.

* "Supplement public school programs serving the disadvantages by providing certain resources such as "library books, physical space, teaching aids, school lunches, textbook fees and school supplies," when public funds are not adequate.

* "Provide opportunities for adult education, and support programs of retraining for job skills by both public and private institutions.

* "Directly urge" elected officials to reexamine national priorities in order to provide larger sums for education.

* "Provide "education of the highest quality, second to none," in Baptist colleges.

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The members of the education study group also said that private, church-related colleges should be free to use public funds, since they are "no longer, in the main, strictly sectarian, but provide a public function in education." Accepting public funds should be done when "the provisions of the First Amendment to the Constitution are preserved inviolate," they said.

The last suggestions which was approved by a 10 to 3 vote in the small group's discussion, drew a spirited debate in the plenary session when the report was made. During the plenary sessions, however, no votes were taken.

John Tubbs, secretary of the Sunday School and church building department of the Maryland Baptist Convention dissented strongly and suggested that Baptists should "cut their schools loose" rather than receive public funds.

L. D. Johnson, chaplain of students at Furman University in Greenville, S.C., said it was "not only right but absolutely imperative" for colleges to be free to accept public funds, within the limitation of the First Amendment.

In addition to cutting the schools loose, Johnson said Baptists faced three other alternatives: (1) reducing our colleges to Bible schools, (2) raising tuition and fees to let them become "schools for rich men's kids," and (3) receiving public funds within the protection of laws provided by the First Amendment without compromising Baptist principles.

Conference participants came from the following Baptist bodies: American Baptist Convention, Baptist General Conference, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., The North American Baptist General Conference, The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., and the Southern Baptist Convention.