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April 15, 1970

**Where Are European Baptists  
Headed, Two Groups Question**

by Theo Sommerkamp  
Director, European Baptist Press Service

RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)--What future role will Baptists fill as a denomination in Europe? What course lies ahead for the international Baptist seminary in Ruschlikon?

These questions emerged from meetings of two European Baptist leadership groups both which convened in Ruschlikon.

"Do Baptists offer something distinctive as a denomination to Europeans today?" was a question raised in the annual meeting of general secretaries of Baptist unions in various countries.

Some were pessimistic about how much of a distinctive Baptist denomination will still exist in Europe at the end of the 20th Century.

A number of national unions decline in membership each year. Only a few make even modest gains, it was pointed out.

Free church mergers have been considered by some national Baptist groups in Europe. One Baptist union is thinking of merging its theological seminary with those of two other free church denominations.

In each European country, it was pointed out, Baptists are a tiny minority in the population. On the other hand, the Southern Baptist Convention which sponsors the international seminary here has majority status in many areas of the United States.

(In Richmond, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area secretary for Europe and the Middle East, J. D. Hughey, took a differing view when asked to respond to the report by European Baptist Press Service on the discussion of general secretaries of Baptist unions in Europe.

"I have great hope for the future of European Baptists, for American-European Baptist relationships, and for the role of Ruschlikon in Europe; and I think most Baptists in Europe share this hope," Hughey said.

("There are problems, and facing them may be a first step toward their solution," Hughey added.)

One problem cited by C. Ronald Goulding, European Baptist Federation secretary, was that a majority of young people in Europe have begun to wonder if Baptist beliefs can withstand the test against biblical revelation and historical criticism.

Mrs. Erik Ruden, wife of the general secretary of the Baptist Union of Sweden, said Baptist young people there are forming contacts across denominational borders.

This line of discussion continued in the yearly meeting of the Ruschlikon seminary trustees who met the day after the union officers ended their conference. The trustees applied the question to the future of the seminary itself and raised other questions as well. Among the questions were:

Since national Baptist seminaries are growing, and several have working agreement with recognized universities, how might these agreements affect the international seminary in Ruschlikon? Will they endanger Ruschlikon seminary's own reasons for being. Though these questions were raised, they could not be answered.

American-European relationships at the seminary were also discussed, including such things as the tradition that the president has been an American staff member or missionary of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, and the faculty has included Americans and Europeans. Also discussed was a comparatively high attrition rate among American faculty members.

The European emphasis in theological education differs from that prevailing in the Southern Baptist Convention, some trustees pointed out. Religious education, and certain aspects of practical theology, have not been popular in Europe as seminary subjects, while they are major emphases in America.

It was pointed out that while the name "Ruschlikon" in Baptist minds most often is associated with the "seminary" here, the Ruschlikon campus houses more than the seminary. Here also are headquarters for a Baptist radio recording studio and training center, and the European Baptist Press Service, news agency of the European Baptist Federation.

Political neutrality and its central location has enabled Switzerland to become a conference center for Europe. Eastern Europeans find it easier to come here than other Western European countries.

The influence of Ruschlikon seminary on European Baptists is attested by the fact that many of the current general secretaries or presidents of the national unions have studied at Ruschlikon.

The basic issues at these meetings seem to fall into three categories: (1) the future of Baptists as a distinctive denomination in Europe; (2) American-European relationships at Ruschlikon; and (3) Ruschlikon's continuing role as a Baptist international seminary and activities center in the current European environment.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The author, Theo Sommerkamp, has been director of European Baptist Press Service, the news service of the European Baptist Federation in Ruschlikon, for the past five years. Previously, he was for 10 years assistant director of Baptist Press, news service of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville.

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President Asks Elderly  
To Express Their Views

4/15/70

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Richard Nixon has called on voluntary organizations and private groups, along with government officials at every level, to plan special meetings during the month of May to give elderly persons a chance to speak out concerning their needs.

In a proclamation designating May as Senior Citizens Month, the President also announced plans for a White House Conference on Aging in 1971.

"For too long we have lacked a national policy and commitment to provide adequate services and opportunities for older people," the President declared. The purpose of the White House Conference will be to develop just such a policy, he said.

The President's special assistant for the aging, John Martin, who is also the commissioner on aging in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, will direct the conference.

Nixon said he was asking Martin to devote the rest of this year to encouraging "all older people to speak out regarding their needs." He said he also wanted to know how older people see themselves in helping to meet these needs and how they believe they can contribute to raising the quality of life for all Americans.

In keeping with the plan and purpose of the White House Conference, the President announced that the theme for the May 1970 Senior Citizens Month shall be "Older Americans Speak to the Nation--Prologue to the 1971 White House Conference on Aging."

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