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**Christian Education Will
Survive "Surging Forces"**

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By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE (BP)--Christian higher education, buffeted unmercifully by society's "surging forces," faces both the possibility of destruction and the opportunity for a powerful influence, educators from across the Southern Baptist Convention were told here.

"The conflicts of society and the polarization about many present-day issues create almost impossible situations for the Christian college," Grady C. Cothen, president of the SBC's Sunday School Board, told members of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools (ASBCS).

But Cothen refused to sound the death knell of Christian education which, he said, possesses an "attractive hope in higher education." Society has "not covered you up yet," he told his listeners. "Indeed, most of your schools are stronger now than they ever have been."

In three addresses as the association's annual H. I. Hester lecturer, Cothen, a former college and seminary president, explored societal trends threatening inundation of Christian education.

Using the trends as a backdrop, he offered theological, philosophical and practical alternatives to surrender by Christian education in the face of growing secularization.

If the conflicts of society "can be met and dealt with, the resultant climate should be good for growth and development of a qualitatively different higher education," he said.

"The issue basically, thus, is to survive in a society that is basically antithetical in many of its positions to the philosophical base of the Christian college. The college must survive in this atmosphere and somehow attempt to change it," declared the former president of both Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

But, he cautioned, the extremes of the permissive society cannot be countered by maintaining the absolute and authoritarian positions of the 1940s and 50s.

"Large segments of the population are more comfortable in the old patterns of authority... Groups of vigilantes are rising everywhere. Varying right-wing elements in society are intensifying their efforts to regain control of a society which they feel is slipping from their grasp," he said, citing trends toward credalism and other types of authoritarianism in both the denomination and society at large.

"These reactionary forces are increasingly active in education. In the name of Americanism and religion, they are pressing colleges to maintain the positions of the 40s and 50s," he told representatives of 71 Baptist colleges, universities, seminaries and schools.

"Christian higher education particularly," he continued, "is caught between these warring forces. Constituents of the Christian college may very well fall into both camps... The Christian institution is suffering from both its friends and its enemies."

The Christian college which attempts to deal with present realities, he said, must recognize the rising tide of personal freedom vs. authority and understand complex governmental and legal actions which affect its manner of operation.

It must do so without losing its distinctive--"the institution exists because of Christian presuppositions"--but it must do so in an atmosphere of openness, freedom to seek truth, and concern for individual rights.

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A sticky problem, Cothen declared, revolves around the institution's ability to hold its own in the turmoil of conflicting demands from its various "publics"--students, parents, denomination, community leaders, governmental policy makers, courts, faculty members and others.

"Society, in many instances, still expects the kind of conduct from colleges and universities that existed in the earlier days," he cited as an example.

One issue at point, he said, is that parents, on the one hand, may often expect institutions to maintain the doctrine of "in loco parentis" (institution acting in place of parent) when its legal authority, in the changing national scene, has become "at best questionable."

"The courts seem to have made clear that at least in the public institutions, that civil rights of students may not be violated. Due attention must be given to assure that the legal requirements are met in dealing with students. Most legal authorities believe that these rulings will apply soon to private institutions."

But, despite ramifications which pull against institutional controls, Christian schools, he said, must maintain basic Christian moral and ethical standards for administration, faculty and students.

He gave a detailed working model of a Christian college.

It centers around a Christian community on campus--run by administrators, staff and faculty with a deep Christian commitment--which recognizes individual worth and human need, along with professionalism and educational quality, and allows flexibility of behavior and the right of criticism--even of the president--without sacrificing basic standards of conduct.

"There will need to be an understanding by all members of the community that a denomination has a right to create and maintain an educational institution . . . The denomination has an obligation to support the institution if it exercises the right of control of the institution."

Complete openness with the denomination is essential, he said. Valid criticisms from the denomination should be taken into consideration by the institution. Invalid ones should be carefully explained, not only to the denominational leadership but to the rank and file. The Christian (educational) community must "take pains to try to create the same sort of Christian attitudes toward the denomination that it tries to create internally."

"The curriculum of a Christian institution," he said, "must meet the needs of young, growing, expanding minds as they are about to go into a world that is hostile, basically, to the faith which they hold."

It must show a willingness, he said, to discuss the issues--educational, moral, ethical and spiritual--which confront the student in his everyday life and which confront the institution.

"This will require a high degree of intellectual honesty, and it will require a considerable amount of understanding on the part of the constituency. Many Baptist people still believe their young people ought to be protected from alien ideas and from confrontation with the world in which they must live."

"Openness and discussion and confrontation of ideas," he said, "will prevent students from becoming 'hot house plants'. It can produce leaders who think, but leaders who feel as well."

CORRECTION

In BP story mailed 6-26-75, headlined "Woman Heads Deans' Group; Educators Conduct Business," change the word addition to edition in line 6 of graph 7. (Also, no photo will be sent with that story.)