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Seminary Trustees Note 'Inerrancy' Resolution

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Trustees of Southern Baptists' six seminaries have taken note of—but responded differently—to a resolution on doctrinal integrity adopted at the 1980 St. Louis convention.

The resolution exhorted "trustees of seminaries and other institutions affiliated with or supported by the SBC to faithfully discharge their responsibility to carefully preserve the doctrinal integrity of our institutions..."

Four of the seminaries—Southwestern, New Orleans, Southeastern and Midwestern—took action on the resolution while the other two—Southern and Golden Gate—delayed action until the spring of 1981.

Only one institution—Southeastern—responded directly, while the other three took indirect action.

Each of the actions, however, refused to use "infallible" and "inerrant," key words to those attacking the seminaries for alleged "liberalism."

Southeastern trustees adopted a statement to be included in their annual report to the convention which says: "The trustees ... perceive their trusteeship as a sacred trust. We acknowledge the resolution...and assure the convention that this seminary employs, and continues employment of, personnel under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in accordance with scriptural truths..."

It lists 29 scripture references, identical to the list included in the Baptist Faith and Message statement adopted by the SBC in 1963. Southeastern president Randall Lolley said the response was "within the context" of the statement, and added the scriptures "speak to the matter of doctrinal integrity very adequately."

At Southwestern, trustees approved a resolution praising faculty and administration, and requested board chairman Kenneth Chafin of Houston to ask the Committee on Order of Business at the 1981 SBC in Los Angeles for "at least an hour" in which trustees of Southwestern and the other five seminaries can report to the convention "about our stewardship."

Chafin will contact Doug Watterson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tenn., chairman of the order of business committee, to ask for the time slot.

"I think Southern Baptists deserve to know what we have been doing since we were elected," he said. "If they have to bump some inspirational speaker, I hope they will."

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At Midwestern, trustees opted not to respond. "We read the resolution and saw in it no specific instructions to make a report to anybody," said Paul Batson of Marion, S.C., trustee chairman.

He said it exhorted trustees "to do what we have been doing all along," which is to "seek to ascertain beliefs and the spiritual life of our institution without standing over our people or putting them through an inquisition."

The resolution, he said, was general: "We cannot refute generalized attacks. When the specifics come in, we will deal with them. Trustees already have answered criticism of one professor, but it keeps surfacing again and again. We resolved that two or three years ago."

He said he knows of no liberals at the seminary: "I wish those people who stand way off and take potshots at our people could sit down and know these men. They are soul winners, believe the Bible, are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and to service in proclaiming the cross. I feel very good about them."

At New Orleans, board chairman Robert McGee of Ruston, La., said the executive committee drafted "An Open Letter to Southern Baptists."

"Our statement is not an effort to comply with the resolution," McGee said. "That would be impossible. Our statement is an effort to tell Southern Baptists that we are doctrinally and denominationally committed...that we haven't lost our moorings."

McGee said the "real question" is not whether we believe in the Bible, but whether we have faith in each other. We can quibble about terms, but if we have lost faith in each other, we cannot bridge the gap," he added.

The open letter says trustees took action "to reinforce our doctrinal and denominational commitment" in March 1979, previous to the Houston meeting of the SBC in which doctrinal integrity emerged as a critical issue.

"We have acted in good faith toward the denomination," the statement says. "We believe that our statement of faith as a seminary is explicit and adequate and that the administration and faculty have made a conscientious and faithful response."

The Ruston pastor added: "We are trying to tell Southern Baptists we have not altered our course. We may be using words different from those of some other group, but we believe our commitment to Scripture as the inspired word of God is as basic as it can be."

At both Southern and Golden Gate, only executive committees met, opting to delay action until the spring meeting.

"We discussed the resolution and will suggest an appropriate and positive response for the full board to consider in its April meeting," said William Pinson, president of Golden Gate.

At Southern, a spokesman said the resolution was not on the agenda and was not officially discussed. "There was a great deal of concern and hall discussion," he added.

Bishop Synod Wrestles
With Family Questions

By C.B. Hastings

VATICAN CITY (BP)--Have you ever watched a carousel until you were almost hypnotized? It has a double rhythm. The same figures keep popping up as the circular motion leads to nowhere.

Some of us watching this Fifth Synod of Bishops debate marriage and family life in Rome have much the same feeling. The same issues recur; no Church laws are about to be changed; pastoral problems cry out for practical guidance—but who can tell yet if the circles will get untracked and move toward a profitable end?

The 219 bishops representing 112 countries of the Catholic world have wrestled with a host of problems with unquestioned honesty. They indicate a genuine desire to strike a balance between traditional Church laws, often formulated in simpler times, and pastoral adaptation to today's more urgent and complex needs of family life.

No doubt there is a consensus on certain basics. The family as the "domestic church" is a prime focus of Catholic life, the first and most important educator, the best agent of evangelization. Anything which violates life and love as defined by Catholic teachings is strictly forbidden by law: contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage, pre-marital cohabitation, test tube babies.

But there is increasing recognition that Church teachings define the ideal and pastors, canon lawyers, moral theologians and even the Vatican must practice "the art of the possible." The synod reflects this in its call for a "Family Directory" to match the recent "Catechetical Directory" (issued in connection with the theme of the last synod in 1977). Many are unwilling to wait for the revision of Canon Law which has already taken 15 years for preparation with no publication date in sight. There are calls also for more freedom for regional or national episcopal conferences to produce their own guidelines. And in the face of mounting challenges from governments that pass laws contrary to the Church, many want a "Charter of Family Rights" as a defense against what is believed to be a concerted secular attempt to destroy the Christian family.

Such a "Family Directory" would provide pastoral guidelines, perhaps adaptable to differing cultures, for such problems as these:

How to regularize the practice of granting annulments now that diocesan tribunals have far greater discretionary powers than previously? (In the past 10 years since the Vatican turned such decisions over to local bishops, there has been a very large increase in the number and causes of annulments). How to educate couples among poorly educated peoples in "natural family planning" when less than 20 percent of Catholic couples use such method for birth control in the developed countries? Should communion be granted to the divorced and remarried? (Most bishops say no). Should it be given to Protestant spouses under certain conditions in order to encourage spiritual community of husbands and wives? (Very little support)

There is a certain irony in a special problem some pastors confront when a "baptized but no longer believing" person comes to be married. It has long been true, especially for the Protestant party, that proof of baptism is sufficient evidence of Christian right to marry. When two Christian parties marry in the presence of the priest, the two spouses (even if one is non-Catholic) "administer the sacrament" to each other. In the light of the growing number of youth today who have lost the faith, is their ceremony a valid marriage?

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One of the English language small groups proposed to the assembly "that faith be recognized as a condition of sacramental marriage." And if the prior condition of faith be recognized here, Baptists would argue that it ought also to be a precondition of baptism.

In marriage as a whole and especially in mixed marriages there has been much call for more preparation through education. Some believe the Church should undertake education in sexuality even while urging such as the responsibility of the family. Pastors and mature lay couples should devote more time to premarital counseling and even follow the wedding with further education toward maturity. In cases of mixed marriages, which now have reached 40 percent in the U.S., there should be more joint pastoral effort with the pastor of the Protestant party. On this, appeal was made to Pope Paul's 1970 decree on mixed marriages which stated, "To these ends it is to be desired that those pastors should establish relationship of sincere openness and enlightened confidence with ministers of other religious communities."

The bishops, as pastors, are recognizing that the couple in a Catholic-Protestant marriage is not to be blamed for the problem which centuries of alienation have dumped upon them.

Many of the ills that afflict the modern family are common to all, Baptists as well. On the one hand, it is a relief that Baptist polity does not try to wrestle with laws and regulations designed for every marriage or family problem. On the other, it would certainly behoove pastors, denominational leaders and laity alike to devote more study and ministries to Christian families today, who struggle against almost superhuman odds to grow lives that are strong in the faith and in the solidarity of Christian love.

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Colorado, Ohio Baptists
Support Tragic Family

Baptist Press
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COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP)--Southern Baptists in Ohio and Colorado joined hands to support a family struck by tragedy when the parents were killed in an auto accident in Wyoming.

The Roger Diddle family from Sharon Woods Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, had just finished visiting friends in Longmont, Colo., when Diddle and his wife Judy were killed, leaving three young children.

All three were hospitalized and in body casts in Fort Collins, Colo. Tim, 13, had just finished a week as a photographer at a statewide youth camp in Colorado. His sisters are Missy, 10, and Amy, 16 months.

Sharon Woods' pastor, Robert Wiley, flew to Colorado to be with the orphaned children. Longs Peak Baptist Church in Longmont provided meals and gasoline expense for the Jerry Rinnert family--where the Diddles were visiting before the accident--so they could commute between their home and the hospital to see the children.

The children's aunt and uncle, Jim and Barbara Porco, from Columbus, flew to Colorado and returned to Columbus with them. The Porcos were close the children previously and may adopt them.

When they returned to Columbus, they were visited by the Ohio State football team.

Sharon Woods will name its new education building the Diddle Memorial Christian Education Center in honor of the parents. Diddle, 34, was building chairman and it was to be dedicated in September. Dedication will wait until the children are well enough to participate.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story mailed Oct. 24 entitled "Roundtable, Jewish Leaders Hit Carter Administration," please change identification of Richard Hogue in paragraph five to read... Hogue, a former Southern Baptist evangelist and current pastor of MetroChurch in Edmond, Okla.,.... (MetroChurch is not a Baptist church). Thanks, Baptist Press