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March 26, 1987

87-45

Surgeon General Responds
To Conservatives' Criticisms

By David Wilkinson

N-10
(CLK)

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--Faced with the gravity of the AIDS crisis, American Christians who are concerned about AIDS education in the public schools should consider "the weight of scientific evidence" rather than the criticisms of "a few people who seem to have as their life goal the genocide of homosexuals," U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop told a Southern Baptist conference on family issues.

Koop responded to his critics during an address and a question-and-answer session at a national seminar in Charlotte, N.C., sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. Koop, a conservative Presbyterian, has been attacked by some conservative religious leaders for his advocacy of stepped-up sex education in the face of the country's growing AIDS problem.

"Before some of my critics even knew what sex was, I was decrying the kind of sex education that somehow has gotten off track," he said, stressing his "sincerest wish is that parents be the primary teachers of children about sex." The problem, he said, is that many parents "default" on that important responsibility, leaving children to learn about their sexuality from the media and other sources.

The need for increased sex education is critical, Koop said, because of the unique threat of AIDS. More than 32,000 AIDS cases have been reported in the United States, and more than half of those victims already have died, he said. The Public Health Service has predicted that more than 250,000 Americans will have contracted AIDS by 1990.

While the disease has dominated two primary groups -- homosexuals and intravenous drug abusers -- the AIDS virus is spreading rapidly into the heterosexual community, Koop emphasized: "We must be very clear about this disease in at least two respects. It is spreading among more Americans, and it is killing more Americans as it spreads."

Koop noted his report on AIDS, released last October, included less than 200 words on the issue of sex education, "yet those few words have captured most of the attention of the media, of parents, of educators and of public officials at all levels of government."

The reason for such concern, he said, "is that the issue goes to the heart of each person's own system of moral and ethical values or lack thereof."

Koop has drawn criticism for his recent stands by the Coalition for Teen Health, headed by Phyllis Schlafly, founder and president of the conservative activist organization, Eagle Forum. Southern Baptists on the new coalition are Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, and his wife, Dorothy, of Dallas; Nancy and Anne Pressler, the wife and daughter, respectively, of Houston appeals court judge Paul Pressler; former U.S. Congressman Albert Lee Smith Jr., a Birmingham, Ala., insurance executive, and his wife, Eunice; and Ed McAteer of Memphis, Tenn., founder and president of The Roundtable.

Responding to a question about the recent criticism of his statements, Koop drew sustained applause when he said, "I'm not here in this government to make people like Phyllis Schlafly happy. I'm here to keep people like you alive."

Koop also stressed the narrow focus of his role as a health officer, pointing out "I don't have the luxury as the surgeon general of delivering moral treatises."

In his address, Koop noted "homosexuality is an issue you can't avoid if you're going to discuss AIDS."

"If you regard homosexuality as a sin, then please teach that the sin must be separated from the sinner," he said. "The sick and the dying require our care and compassion, no matter how the disease was contracted."

Koop challenged Southern Baptists, who comprise the nation's largest non-Catholic religious body, to "write the definitive sex education curriculum."

"No one is better equipped to be in the vanguard of this important initiative than you are," he said. "Do it according to your standards. You won't get it into many public schools if you write it the way I think you will write it, but it will compete for the minds of your children and someday you will be able to say, 'We achieved this health goal for our people, and we did it without abandoning our tradition or our beliefs.'"

In producing such an educational program, he said, "You might just be responsible for producing a generation that will understand its own sexuality and be able to pass that on to the next generation without embarrassment and without restraint."

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Nigerians Respond To Loss
With Prayer, Praise, Song

By Mary Jane Welch

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IBADAN, Nigeria (BP)—Christians in northern Nigeria returned to burned-out church buildings, picked blocks from the rubble for seating and held joyous worship services the Sunday after Muslim-Christian riots shook the area.

Christian churches throughout the Zaria and Kaduna areas also were meeting at 9 a.m. daily for praise and prayer, said Don Reece, chairman of the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Nigeria. "It was quite a witness to the people who had done all the damage," he said.

Thirteen Baptist church buildings were among the Christian churches burned in Kaduna state and a couple of neighboring towns after riots that left 13 dead and most Christian churches in Zaria burned, reported Reece after a survey trip through the area March 18 and 19. S.T. Ola Akande, general secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, and four other convention staffers also were part of the survey team. "We went to encourage them, and I think we were encouraged," said Reece.

The survey team estimated damage to Baptist property at about \$37 million.

Five church buildings in the Kaduna area, seven in Zaria and one in the home mission area around Funtua were burned, said Reece. The survey team feels parts of two buildings can be salvaged but thinks the other 10 will have to be razed and rebuilt. There are more than 200 Baptist churches in the affected Baptist associations.

Besides the churches, two nursery and primary schools run by Baptist churches were burned, and five pastors, including the home missionary in Funtua, lost their homes. The team learned of only one Baptist who was injured. F.T. Lateju, pastor of Orié Ofé Baptist Church, required stitches after being hit over the head with a club.

Already Nigerian Christians are giving through the Christian Association of Nigerians in a number of states, including Kaduna, to help Christians who lost everything, said Reece. Akande has written a letter to all Nigerian Baptist churches asking their help, and Reece sent a telegram on behalf of the Nigerian convention asking aid from the Baptist World Alliance. His own church in Ibadan, far to the southwest, already has responded with an offering of about \$300, he said.

Nigerian Baptists are handling immediate needs, but the mission organization hopes to offer some assistance in the long-term aid for reconstruction, Reece said.

Reece said Nigerian Baptists have reacted "in a beautiful way." Mosques were reported damaged in only one city, Kafanchan, where the rioting started among university students. Newspapers reported three mosques in that city were burned, he said.

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Reece said he was overcome with the greatest feeling of sadness he had ever felt when he saw the damage in Kaduna state, but he was encouraged by the ways Christians responded. He was especially encouraged when he saw the Christians, both Catholic and evangelical, meeting daily in their churches. "The fact that they were willing to meet openly and sing and praise and pray while the people who did the work looked on at them showed courage and a lot of maturity and certainly a Christlike spirit," he said.

Christians in other parts of Nigeria are reacting in a similar spirit, he said. In his own church, people were aghast when the news was first announced. "I think when you hear it first, you can't help from having a kind of anger," he said. "But the longer we talked, the more you could see wisdom and maturity overtaking the shock of first hearing it."

When the pastor appealed to the congregation for help for the victims, "He said to the congregation, 'We cannot strike back. We must pray and we must show the proper Christian attitude to these people who have been responsible for the persecution.'"

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Court Affirms Decision
On Restricting Cable TV

By Kathy Palen

N- BJC
Baptist Press
3/26/87

WASHINGTON (BP)—The U.S. Supreme Court has limited the power of states to restrict "indecent" programs on cable television by affirming a lower court ruling overturning Utah law.

The Utah statute, which was struck down on grounds it violated the First Amendment, confined cablecasting of indecent programming — material displaying specifically described sexual activity, but not considered legally obscene — to the hours between midnight and 7 a.m.

By its 7-2 vote to affirm, the Supreme Court gave the lower court ruling precedential effect throughout the United States rather than only in the circuit in which it was decided. Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justice Sandra Day O'Connor voted to hear Utah's appeal.

In 1983, the Utah legislature passed its second effort to regulate indecent program material on cable television by placing restrictions on its presentation. The original statute — approved in 1981, but struck down almost immediately as constitutionally overbroad — made it a misdemeanor for cable television operators to distribute "pornographic or indecent material" and defined the term "indecent" to include almost any sexual activity.

In drafting the 1983 bill, the state legislature more narrowly defined "indecent material" and replaced the criminal penalty with a maximum \$1,000 fine for first-time offenders.

The day after the law's passage, four cable television operators filed suit against the state attorney general. In separate action, several cable television subscribers also filed suit. The federal district court for Utah later consolidated the cases and allowed Home Box Office to join as a plaintiff.

The district court in April 1985 held the law unconstitutional because it regulated material that was not legally obscene. Two months later, it permanently enjoined enforcement of the law. The 10th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the district court decision.

In his appeal to the Supreme Court, Utah Attorney General David L. Wilkinson said the entire nation would benefit from the high court's clarifying the extent to which regulation of cable programming is permissible. Laws similar to the Utah statute have been proposed in nine other states and numerous communities.

Wilkinson argued the lower courts' rulings result in a state's having "no constitutional authority to regulate any patently offensive material other than that which is obscene."

Joining in a friend-of-the-court brief, 10 other states urged the court to hear Utah's appeal. They argued the lower courts created an "absolute 'either-or' rule" resulting in material being "obscene and therefore totally restricted or not obscene and in no manner restricted."

The states were Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Washington and West Virginia.

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'Grand New Opportunity'
Confronts CLC, Baker Says

By Marv Knox

N-10

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)—An age of moral crisis and dissatisfaction "is a marvelous time to step into the ministry" of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, N. Larry Baker said during his installation as the fourth executive director of the national ethics agency March 23.

"Our nation is in crisis," Baker told participants in the commission's annual seminar in Charlotte, N.C. "Dishonesty, duplicity and deception are in epidemic proportions. Integrity is a lost commodity. ... The social problems that plague us are complex and comprehensive."

But the Christian Life Commission "will not join the religious handwringers who say nothing constructive can be done for or with our world," he insisted. "God calls us to see the possibilities, seize our opportunities in faith and to act aggressively. God wants us to take hold of the problems of our day with faith, hope and love — and plunge in to do what we can with him to solve them."

Consequently, the commission stands on the threshold of "a grand new opportunity," Baker said. "The day in which we minister differs from others before. We will strike out in new directions in response to our call and under the impetus of God's Spirit."

"We give thanks for what God has done in the past, but we will not settle there or enshrine that; rather, we commit ourselves to be our best in pursuit of God's dream for us. We will not be enslaved to a past, its approaches or its style; rather, we will do our best to live in faithfulness to God in our new day, to deal with issues current and to forge approaches that make it possible for Southern Baptists to respond effectively and to act responsibly in our world."

Baker said he begins his tenure "with a clear sense of God's calling." He also expressed gratitude for the "shaping vision and nurturing life of Southern Baptists" and reported a sense of indebtedness to family, friends and fellow believers in Christ who have shared his Christian journey.

The new ethics leader cited as a model for ministry the life of Jesus Christ as "the way to which we are called in our living." The source of direction for his life "is the belief that God's Word, the Bible, is able to make us wise for salvation and to equip us thoroughly for every good work."

Baker also offered a pledge to Southern Baptists:

- "To stand for, speak in behalf of and call for a recovery of biblical morality.
- "To stand for, speak in behalf of and call for moral righteousness in every sector of our nation's life.
- "To speak out against the evils that plague our age, that thwart the purposes of God for his world and destroy the lives of persons.
- "To help Southern Baptists amass our strength and align our power in the cause of right and righteous living.
- "To call Southern Baptists to be aggressive, to seize the initiative and to give strong leadership in the moral arena.
- "To give my best energies to developing ways and means for Southern Baptists in all walks of life to put their faith to work."

Baker's response to the task he began March 15 was the conclusion of "a special, sacred moment," said C.W. Brister, professor of pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Earlier in the installation service, Brister presented Baker with a list of challenges in his new task. Brister urged Baker to "arouse new interest in the moral development of children and youth," develop "ethical initiatives in all structures of American society," fight evil and "challenge humankind toward righteousness," set up a network that utilizes Baptist resources and the aid of other Christians, protect and nurture his own marriage and family, "keep faith with your friends and be kind to your foes" and work hard with faith in God and confidence of Baptist support.

Baker will need such faith and confidence for tackling the "integrity crisis in the American church" described by Bob R. Agee, president of Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, who delivered the installation address.

Agee cited recent surveys that reveal the decline of morality in America. "Studies show that there is very little difference in the opinions and behavior of the churched and the unchurched on a wide range of items," he said. And although Christians are "the only Bible some people will ever read," he claimed the behavior of many of those Christians is sending "conflicting signals" to non-Christians, with negative results.

He called for a "new agenda for the church" to correct America's integrity crisis.

The first point on that agenda is a rediscovery of what the Bible says about "the nature and function of Christians in the world." This includes a priority on evangelism, growth in Christ-likeness, application of Scripture to all areas of life and ministry in Jesus' name, he explained.

Second, he urged reaffirmation of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. "I call upon all of us to get back to the basics of our faith — commit ourselves to an honest, thorough exegesis of Scripture, willing to let the Bible speak, willing to stand with one another in brotherly love, striving to restore integrity and credibility to the Gospel we preach," he said.

He also called on seminar participants to "renew our zeal, our commitment to be a strong, clear voice as representatives of our Lord in the midst of our nation's moral and ethical confusion."

"The stakes are too high and the time is too short for us to expend our emotional and spiritual energies attacking Christian brothers," he insisted. "We need each other."

Speaking directly of the Christian Life Commission, Agee said: "We as Southern Baptists are at a major crossroads. The CLC can play a strategic role in helping us get on with the business of communicating a Gospel with integrity to this lost and dying world. God has led this commission to elect Dr. Larry Baker as your leader.

"It will be a tragedy of the highest order if we do not join hands and hearts with him, his staff and the rest of our brothers as Southern Baptists, with the commitment to pray for each other, love each other, work diligently with each other to tackle the tough issues based on a sound 'Thus saith the Lord.'"