Dr. Elliott's Dismissal Leaves Unanswered Questions

IT IS TOO EARLY yet for full and complete reflection on the dismissal of Dr. Ralph Elliott from the Midwestern Seminary faculty, but questions keep coming to mind as we try to analyze this move and the impact it will have on Southern Baptist life in the future.

What will this do to theological education in the convention? What will be the effect on the morale of other seminary professors? We understand that several other men at Midwestern are reportedly on the verge of leaving, but that Dr. Elliott has urged them to stay. This reveals something of the spirit of the man who will be looking for a new job now. He won't have any difficulty, but Midwestern and the convention itself will not recover that easily. Midwestern is our youngest SBC seminary and such a blow will not be recovered from without considerable pain.

Does this action mean that even fewer books will be published in the future by seminary professors? Even now, the trickle of scholarly works is so pitifully small. Now the largest Protestant body in America, the Southern Baptist Convention probably will return to its diet of books of sermons and other harmless volumes. And you can be sure the Sunday School Board won't take the chance of getting involved again as it did with Dr. Elliott's book.

Still another question—was the republication impasse the real reason for the dismissal of Dr. Elliott? According to the news story in this issue, Dr. Elliott and the special committee agreed on nine points—and some of them were very important ones. But because Dr. Elliott did not surrender republication rights, he was fired, so the story goes. Maybe so, but we wonder. If Dr. Elliott was dismissed because he wrote the book, this should have been given as the reason for his dismissal—and not the technical point of republication rights.

This is not a chapter in our history of which Southern Baptists can be proud. Admittedly, the decision possibly met with the approval of the majority of the convention, especially those in the West and Far West. The spirit of the San Francisco Convention was unmistakable—it wanted Dr. Elliott removed as a professor in a Southern Baptist seminary. After San Francisco, it was only a matter of time until the decision was reached.

Will this satisfy the self-appointed vigilantes who led the fight to fire Dr. Elliott? Who will be next? The Sunday School Board? Other seminaries? The Baptist state papers? Some day the full story should be told of what went on behind the scenes of this battle. It will be interesting to see if some of the "get Elliott" leaders will try to ride to important Southern Baptist Convention offices on the basis of their "victory" at Midwestern Pass. Such actions are disappointing and unworthy of Christian leaders. It's a good thing editors don't reveal all they know about a story.

As was pointed out on this page September 15, it seems that the man is always sacrificed when theological controversies erupt among Southern Baptists. In 1879 it was Dr. Crawford Howell Toy and in 1899 it was Dr. William H. Whitsitt. Now in 1962 Ralph Elliott joins them.

Three-Fold Responsibility Of Higher Education Office

IN HIS OUTSTANDING SPEECH at the recent General Board meeting, Ben C. Fisher outlined what he conceives as the three major functions of the convention's Council on Christian Education which he will head, beginning November 1. Following is the three-fold responsibility as foreseen by the new executive secretary:

The Council has an administrative task; that is, assisting in the division of college funds, bringing about better understanding and cooperation between the colleges themselves and serving as a forum where common problems can be discussed and solutions reached. The Council exercises no direct authority over the colleges since this is in the hands of trustees and administrators.

One of the most important tasks of the Council is serving as an interpreter, endeavoring to offer two-way communication between the colleges and the denomination—and the denomination and the colleges. Much of the tension which has developed from time to time between the colleges and denomination has been caused by either a breakdown in communication or because no real attempt had been made in communication. One graduate of a Baptist college, or one student, can bring endless unfavorable publicity which, unfortunately, fixes itself firmly in the minds of people. On the other hand, five busy doctors in a single church can attend a revival meeting every single night and engage in personal work during the day—and yet somehow this never gets to our people. "I am not speaking theoretically, but out of personal experience," Mr. Fisher makes clear at this point.

The Council can also be helpful in research and study. Many of the issues facing Christian colleges are complex and not easily solved. Some of these change from generation to generation. The Council can keep abreast of what is going on in the realm of Christian higher education, whatever denominational differences may exist. We have much to learn, both positively and negatively, from what is being done in other great Protestant bodies.

There are other challenges of the office — finances, strengthening curriculums, and working with alumni—but these three tasks remain basic. The RECORDER believes that North Carolina Baptists will continue to give wholehearted support to the efforts of the Council on Christian Education to achieve these and other objectives.

Educators estimate that the parent exercises up to 250 times more influence upon the child than any other teacher. — C. BROWNLOW HASTINGS in *Home Life*