

RELIGION

Call to Action

Watergate--A Moral Crisis

By David E. Anderson
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AFTER two years of pretty much marking time, American churchmen are once again talking about a renewed social activist role for the nation's churches and synagogues.

The reason: Watergate.

"Watergate has put an end to confrontation politics among the branches of government," according to Albert Vorspan, director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregation's social action program.

As a first step to revitalized domestic social action coalition, Vorspan and 17 other religious leaders have joined to form what they call the "Religious Committee for Integrity in Government."

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AMONG the sponsors of the committee are such mainline churchmen as Sterling Cary, president of the National Council of Churches, Robert Campbell, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., Bishop Carroll T. Dozier of the Roman Catholic Church's Memphis diocese; Robert V. Moss, president of the United Church of Christ, and Clarie Collins Harvey, president of Church Women United.

"The times call for citizen affirmation of political responsibility, not cynicism,"

the committee said in announcing itself.

The committee, which will work through Washington-based staff people of the various agencies and groups, makes no bones about describing Watergate as a moral as well as constitutional crisis.

It lists as its immediate goals "clarification" of moral issues involved; "justice for the President and the American people;" election campaign reform, including public financing of campaigns, and "restoration of constitutional checks and balances," including a challenge of President Nixon's use of impoundment of appropriated funds "and the abuse and improper assumption of the functions of law enforcement agencies."

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BISHOP James Armstrong of United Methodist Church, a sponsor of the committee, said it would work to "resensitize the conscience of the land."

"We have been dead to and have worn blinders in the presence of criminality, tax evasion, dirty tricks, gross violations of civil liberties and blatant invasions of privacy."

Vorspan sees the Watergate crisis as providing even wider opportunities for securing "significant federal legislative solutions to neglected social problems in American life."