

BAPTISTS DECRY WATERGATE CASE

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Bid President and Congress
to Improve Leadership

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LINCOLN, Neb., May 27—The Watergate issue kept intruding into the 66th meeting of the American Baptist Churches in the U. S. A., which ended here today.

Initial oblique, but applauded, references by church officials to the need for a stronger Christian influence in national affairs gave way to a cheered, direct reference to Watergate and Nixon Administration policies.

Finally, delegates approved, 892 to 69, an unscheduled "statement of immediate concern" reflecting the convention's view of "the grave crisis which Watergate has brought before our nation."

The statement called upon President Nixon "to provide leadership that is open, direct and honest." It asked Congress to "reassert its leadership role in the initiation and development of government policy." It said that the "only real solution" for the current national malaise requires new integrity in personal relationships and human institutions.

Taking a cue from one speaker, Senator Mark O. Hatfield, Republican of Oregon and a fellow Baptist, the statement urged all citizens to participate in a Christian repentance it said might lead to a national and personal rebirth.

The momentum for official expression about Watergate by a convention originally programmed more for ecclesiastical internal and personal-life matters was seen as dampening criticism of the convention's granting the 1973 Edwin T. Dahlberg peace award to anti-war activist William Sloane Coffin Jr.

The decision to name the controversial Yale University chaplain for the award, first accorded in 1964 to the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was made in February by the organization's general board.

Although hundreds of delegates had left the convention hall, Dr. Coffin won a standing ovation with a plea for a Christian witness directed at amelioration of social and economic problems of an international scale.

Dr. Peter H. Armacost, named president-elect of the 6,200-church denomination, said he sensed "a hunger among our membership for spiritual renewal."

Dr. Armacost, 37 years old, president of Ottawa (Kan.) University since 1967, will be the first person in the organization's history to have a two-year-term, starting Jan. 1, 1974.