

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

NEWSLETTER OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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FEBRUARY, 1953

THE PRESIDENT AND RELIGION

Most Americans rejoiced at the news that President Eisenhower had joined the church. On February 1 he and his wife united with the National Presbyterian Church of Washington, D. C. Not only did the President thus profess his Christian faith, but in other ways, he is exhibiting a warm interest in religion. His prefatory "little prayer," delivered upon the inaugural occasion, has excited widespread approval. Washingtonians opened their eyes when they read in their newspapers that President Eisenhower attended a breakfast prayer meeting, held by Congressmen in the Vandenburg Room at the Capitol. Millions viewed him on television as he spoke in behalf of the American Legion's "Back-to-religion" program. Perhaps this concern for spiritual guidance and grace will rank along with his statesmanship. If so, there will be multitudes who will find new heart.

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SEMI-ANNUAL SESSION, PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

By vote of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in its fall session, date of the spring session was fixed for the month of March, to be held in conjunction with the Baptist World Alliance Executive Committee. It is now announced that the Alliance Committee, on which several members of the Public Affairs Committee serve, will meet Monday and Tuesday, March 16 and 17. The Public Affairs meeting will, therefore, be held on Wednesday, March 18, beginning at 8:00 o'clock in the morning with breakfast attended by committeemen at the Martinique Hotel, 1211 Sixteenth Street, N. W., followed by assembly in the Baptist headquarters building, 1628 Sixteenth Street, N. W., at 10:00 a.m. Subcommittee chairmen are at work in preparation of reports to be submitted on current issues of great moment. The meeting promises to be one of unusual interest and importance.

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THE CONANT EPISODE - "ROGER WILLIAMS STILL LIVES"

An editorial in the Catholic Standard of Washington, D. C., assailed the former president of Harvard, James B. Conant, for alleged attacks on parochial schools and asserted that this disqualified him for High Commissioner to Germany, a position to which President Eisenhower had appointed him. Followed an organized campaign of letter-writing to Senators against Conant.

Any reading of Dr. Conant's speech on national unity, as delivered to the American Association of School Administrators on which the Roman Catholic charge was based, will convince the reader he cordially recognized the right of parochial schools to exist, as determined by the U. S. Supreme Court in the famous Oregon Case of 1926, provided the church schools are not supported out of tax funds. The burden of Dr. Conant's speech was to the effect that a dual system of schools, public and private, both supported out of

tax funds, as in Australia, is contrary to the American system and utterly divisive. In taking this stand surely Dr. Conant was only defending the historic attitude of the United States, expressed repeatedly and most emphatically by the Supreme Court's 8 to 1 decision in the McCollum Case, March 8, 1948, wherein it ruled: "No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion."

If confirmation had been settled on the grounds of the Roman Catholic complaint, it would have meant that sectarian interest controlled the appointment. It would also have meant, inferentially, that this situation was maneuvering the Senate into a practical endorsement of the Roman Catholic contention for tax support of their parochial schools. Accordingly, the Executive Director of the Baptist Public Affairs Committee felt obligated, under the directives of the Committee's constitution, which call for action toward maintaining the American principle of church-state separation, with complete religious liberty for all, to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In doing so he did not presume to testify in Dr. Conant's behalf on certain other questions raised by some, but solely on this issue.

In the course of the testimony Senator Tobey agreed that there might be 57 varieties of Baptists, with some variation in beliefs, but on the principle of church-state separation all Baptist groups were possibly more nearly agreed than on any other doctrine. Then he remarked, "Roger Williams still lives!"

LIQUOR IN THE CAPITAL

Drew Pearson and Dr. Albert P. Shirkey created comment throughout the Nation by calling attention to the bar in the Republican Club, located opposite the House Office Building. A week later the veteran temperance advocate, Clinton Howard, said: "There are 9 drinking places on Independence Avenue, S. E., between 1st and 2nd Streets and two more just around the corner on 1st Street.

"The wettest block anywhere on earth is not the Bowery...nor in the scandalous Latin Quarter of New Orleans, but on Capitol Hill in Washington, immediately across the street from the Congressional Library".

Howard's position on legislative drinking is pretty well summed up by this quotation from Thomas Jefferson: "The habit of using ardent spirits by men in office has occasioned more injury to the public, and more trouble to me, than all other causes."

A week prior Wilbur La Roe, a former president of the Presbyterian General Assembly, had decried the fact that Washington, D. C., is known to lead the Nation in per capita liquor consumption and in the number of assaults, if not in several other categories of crime. General Marshall is reported to have declared that America's worst public enemy is the cocktail lounge in Washington's leading hotel.

Dr. Shirkey, pastor of the large Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church and president of the Washington General Pastors' Association, had the following to say over a television program:

"You ask me on what grounds I protest drinking on the part of Government officials. I will answer you, 'Because they are the servants of the people, and as long as we have Government of the people, by the people, and for the people, we, the people have a right to protest any action that puts in jeopardy the welfare of others.'

"Any pilot who drinks is grounded as unfit for the split-second decisions he is called upon to make. 'If you drink, don't drive' is the slogan of safety for the road. Any athlete who drinks is kept from the game because he cannot do his best. If this be so, it is wrong - deliberately wrong - for men to drink who are called upon for the decisions that affect our lives as a nation and as a world.

"We are in an atomic age - a wrong decision can bring us to the place of disaster over-night. Never have men in high places of Government had such responsibility thrust upon them as now. This is the reason why I protest the opening of a drinking lounge for our Government officials.

"I say again, as I have said before, 'It is a sin and a shame and a blight on our country for this to be done in such a critical hour of the world's history'."

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BOOKS RECEIVED AND COMMENDED

The following books bearing on current matters of interest in the field of public affairs are noted:

The Devil's Chemists, by Josiah E. DuBois, Jr. The Beacon Press, Boston, \$3.75.

This Hospital Business of Ours, by Raymond P. Sloan. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

Lying in State, by Stanton Griffis. Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, \$3.75.

The Big Change, by Frederick Lewis Allen. Harper & Brothers, New York.

College and Life, by M. E. Bennett. McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, \$4.50.

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WHERE HOSPITAL GRANTS SHOULD BE CUT

It is rumored that the administration, in the interest of economy, contemplates making large cuts in the program of hospital construction. Immediately church hospitals in the District of Columbia, expecting huge benefits from allotments made to them out of tax funds over serious protests from people in many sections of the country, took alarm and began a campaign of pressure to compel the Congressional Committees to guarantee fulfillment of their expectations.

Baptists are actively engaged in the hospital business on a grand scale, albeit on their own responsibility apart from government aid. Deeply concerned for a proper care of the sick, they nevertheless do not relish seeing great sums appropriated out of taxes paid by all the people only to be turned to the advantage of a sect which finds the hospital business its best instrumentality for recruiting its membership.

Why should not the Congressional authority consider the dubious action of building giant hospitals on grounds not owned by the Government with title resting in the Pope of Rome or in some other denominational headquarters? Is this not the time for patriotic citizens in all fairness to speak out?

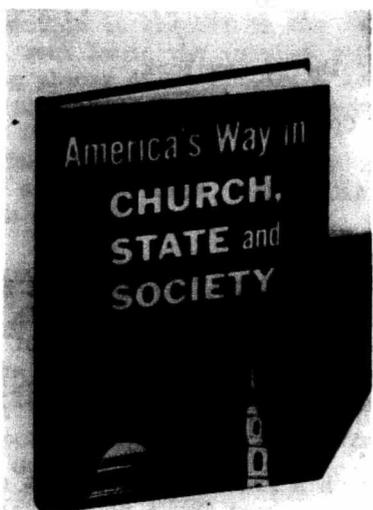
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THE CHURCHES MUST STAND READY TO ACT

The Reverend Robert E. Van Deusen, in charge of the Lutheran Public Affairs office in Washington, D. C., told the National Lutheran Council last week that a denomination which does not voice its convictions in respect to public questions "thereby increases the strength of forces working in the opposite direction." Dr. Paul C. Empie, executive director of the Council, cited the Roman Catholic Church as doing "an effective job," doing so "upon the crest of a surge of popular interest in religious matters." He dwelt on the Roman church's "powerful influence in the fields of radio, television, motion pictures and the press."

This view was taken by the major Baptist Conventions when years ago they established their Joint Committee on Public Affairs, one of the first of the denominational groups to act in this field. Be it remembered that the Committee was established in the Nation's Capital, not for the purpose of lobbying for government tax funds for Baptist agencies nor for seeking special governmental favors, but to aid in maintaining the American distinctive principle of church-state separation as defined in the First Amendment of the Federal Constitution, which is regarded by Baptists as the bulwark of full religious liberty for all. How well the Committee has served toward this end may be judged by the results. That its task is not finished becomes evident by recurring issues constantly demanding true interpretation and correct action.

Timid souls may draw back from such an effort because of a feeling that it sometimes induces controversy, as if comfort and popularity were more important than principle and public interest. We cherish true tolerance, but a false tolerance represents moral cowardice. Taboos on free discussion in a democracy mean sure death to free institutions.



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