

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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OCTOBER, 1953

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RETIRES

On October 13, at the forthcoming semi-annual session of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the present Executive Director will offer his resignation, to take effect December 31, this year, or as soon thereafter as a successor may be installed.

The Special Committee on policy is expected to nominate the new Director at this meeting. Inasmuch as the retiring officer's paper contains a summary of guiding principles which he has followed and some account of accomplishments and continuing challenges, his report is available for those who may request it.

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"PARSON" JOHN LELAND COMMEMORATED

(The author is a direct descendant of the popular Rev. Martin Dawson, who according to Wood's History of Albemarle County, owned 500 acres near Monticello and cooperated effectively with his neighbor Thomas Jefferson in securing the adoption of the Virginia Statutes on Religious Liberty. Dr. Dawson is Executive Director for the Joint Committee on Public Affairs for the Baptists of the United States, and is the author of several books on Church-State relations. He was one of the guest speakers at Orange for the Leland Day celebration.)

Sunday, October 4, was observed in Orange, Virginia as John Leland Day. One thousand people gathered in Leland-Madison Monument Park for the celebration, which took on something of a national commemoration. Both the Junior and Senior Chambers of Commerce are sponsoring the affair. A wealth of interest throughout the country centered in this occasion.

Authorities agree that Leland was the key man in obtaining Virginia's ratification of the Federal Constitution. Without Virginia's favorable action in all probability the Constitution would never have been ratified. The story is a dramatic one and merits perpetuation.

The Reverend John Leland, though a native of Massachusetts, owes his distinguished place in history to his activities in Virginia during sixteen years, from the time he came to Culpeper in 1775 to his return to Massachusetts in 1791. In that period he proved to be a high-ranking statesman as well as a flaming Evangelist. Elected to the Virginia Assembly, he collaborated with Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Mason in behalf of religious liberty, and baptized more than seven hundred converts in the regions stretching between the Ketchikan Mountains and the York River.

While Leland enjoyed the friendship of the great leaders mentioned above, he frankly opposed Madison's seat in the Virginia Ratification Assembly, because he felt Madison's

prized document as shaped lacked a Bill of Rights and should be amended. At a picnic five miles out of Orange the two men conferred, composed their differences, agreed that the Amendment would be offered and Leland pledged his support, with the result that Madison was seated and Virginia ratified the Federal Constitution as amended.

In the meantime Leland, on behalf of the Baptists, had written George Washington at length, saying in the course of his letter, "When the Constitution first made its appearance in Virginia, we, as a society, feared that the liberty of conscience, dearer to us than property or life, was not sufficiently secured....Under the regal government mobs, fines, bonds and prisons were our frequent repast."

Although Washington belonged to the Established Church of Virginia, he sympathized deeply, as evidenced by his reply: "If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution formed by the Convention where I had the honor to preside might possibly endanger the rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and if I now could conceive that the general government might ever be administered so as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny and every species of religious persecution."

Leland might have complained bitterly against cruel persecutions pursued by the establishment toward dissenters, but he confessed that no vital blood had been shed, by which he meant no one had been killed. Actually an irate husband in Orange threatened to shoot Leland when he was about to baptize the angered man's wife. Fortunately friends pacified the objector and Leland proceeded to baptize her.

In Leland's concern for preserving full religious liberty for all, he fought the proposed general assessment for the support of religious teachers in the school. He believed the engrossed bill was repugnant to the Constitution, "that the gospel needed not the feeble arm" of such support, and that "should the Legislature assume the right of taxing the people for the support of the gospel it would be destructive to religious liberty." Joined with Jefferson and Madison and others, he was able to defeat the proposal. -- Washington Post

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ROMAN CATHOLICS CHARGE ROGER WILLIAMS NOT PARTICULARLY TOLERANT

(From "LISTENING IN" column, DENVER, Colorado, THE REGISTER, Sunday, August 30, 1953, page 3, columns 3 - 4 - 5., written by Rt. Rev. Matthew Smith, Ph.D., Litt.D., Jour.D., LL.D., Editor-in-Chief. We republish this because it is a fair sample of the grudging recognition which Roman Catholics accord the founder of the American system of Church-State separation. That Williams persecuted Catholics denies all records and authorities.)

The separation of Church and State has been stressed by Baptists for years, probably owing to the influence of Roger Williams, and all Americans owe him a debt for his insistence that the State must not control the Church. This notion, however, was not new in him, for the Papacy has always promoted the principle of freedom for religion from political control. (Amazing statement. -- J.M.D.)

Many sectarians today who shout for separation of Church and State have no hesitancy, however, in using all sorts of political twists and curves to sway political power for their own ends and to the detriment of Catholics or others. This was John Calvin's method. It is the constant program of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington.

Roger Williams was not a truly tolerant man. He was, as Theodore Maynard has pointed out, a contentious fellow, never happy except when he was quarreling with somebody. He was truculent in dealing with Protestants with whom he did not agree, and refused to join his own wife and children in family prayers because they would not subscribe to all his odd opinions.

He characterized the Catholic Church as a Romish wolf gorged with huge bowls of the blood of the saints; hence Catholics, instead of going to his supposedly tolerant colony, avoided it.

Nowhere in New England, in those days, was there freedom to dissent. The jail and pillory were not used in Rhode Island as instruments of conversion, but the tongue-lashing was furious, and it is a historic fact that in only one English American colony, that of the Quakers in Pennsylvania, were Catholics not persecuted. (There is no existing record of Williams persecuting anyone. -- J.M.D.)

The fine tolerance of Roger Williams and his successors is mythical. He had some general ideas that were an improvement on the bluenose Puritanism of early Massachusetts, but it is simple nonsense to hold him up as the apostle of tolerance who led to the First Amendment.

There must have been a gradual awakening of the Colonial mind, however, to the horror of its religious intolerance, for the principle of religious freedom as the only possible way to keep peace in a religiously divided country was accepted with considerable ease after the Revolution.

A thing for us to remember is that the skirts of Catholic Americans have always been clean on this subject. That is why people who try to make out that we want union of Church and State, or a sly dictatorship of the Catholic clergy over politics, are ridiculous.

(What will The Register say about a thousand years of Catholic persecution of dissenters in Europe and about current Catholic persecutions of non-Catholics in Italy, Spain and Latin America? -- J.M.D.)

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GEORGE B. FRASER DEAD

A cherished member of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Mr. George B. Fraser, died suddenly at the George Washington University Hospital, Saturday, October 3. Probably the last service rendered the denomination in which he held several important offices, was his attendance on the Special Committee on Future Policy, a sub-committee of the Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which convened at Baptist Headquarters on Tuesday preceding his death. Few of our laymen have ever displayed as devoted interest in, or dedicated as much valuable time in expert work as did this efficient man, who gave most generously of himself, his abilities and his money to Christian causes. Millions, North and South, will sorrowfully learn of his passing in mid-life.

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FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND TRUE BROTHERHOOD

(Extracts from address before the Interdenominational Ministers Union of Philadelphia and vicinity by Joseph M. Dawson, Executive Director of Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs)

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I have devoted much of my life to the cultivation of inter-faith good will, and cherish brotherhood in our democracy as we know it in America. I have made it a rule of life never to attack any one's right to his worship, beliefs and institutions, even though I might thoroughly differ in respect to them. I am entirely sincere when I declare I would fight for the right of all others under the Federal Constitution to these as readily as I would fight for my own. Moreover, I can say conscientiously I have never indulged in ugly name-calling or been guilty of hurling epithets at an opponent. I have tried to stay strictly by issues at stake.

Having made these affirmations, I must go on to say that such an attitude does not impose neutrality, silence, or inaction in the face of infringement of the Nation's Constitution and laws. Judges of the Courts, who have pronounced decisions against violations, have not felt there was any consideration of brotherhood that interfered with the correction of abuses. We need a better understanding of tolerance than prevails in some quarters today. It appears that not a few feel that if a question is controversial brotherhood imposes acquiescence, if not appeasement of the wrongdoer. That kind of liberalism would sacrifice every noble freedom achieved by the heroic souls who preceded us.

I make bold to assert that it is the duty of every freedom-loving citizen -- the most fraternal and pious among us -- to stand up with unflinching conviction for the American heritage as embodied in our Constitutional system. Instead of trying to suppress thorough going discussions of public abuses, whether committed by pagans or religionists, every patriot must rise to the defense of his country. If public opinion is so supine that it will not respond to honest, fair and reasonable discussions of principles and facts, appeal to law in due process should be taken.

The organized forces which seek to uphold America's distinguished principle of Separation of Church and State in the interest of religious liberty have in recent years prevented several major infractions of the Federal Constitution and have shut off thirty to forty million dollars in tax monies illegally going to Church agencies. In most instances this has been accomplished by public discussion which has formed controlling opinion. In some cases, however, the evils were so strongly entrenched that it was necessary for the Courts to pronounce against them.

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AMERICA'S WAY IN CHURCH, STATE AND SOCIETY is meeting with wide acceptance and acclaim. Order today from this office, autographed copies, postpaid, \$2.50.

The Christian Century says of this book: "Dr. Dawson's AMERICA'S WAY IN CHURCH, STATE AND SOCIETY is at once exhaustive and comprehensive. The many thousands who know with what energy and intelligence Dr. Dawson has kept watch, in his Washington lookout post, upon threatened breaches of the "wall of separation" or other inroads upon religious liberty, will know at least a part of what they have a right to expect in this book. They will not be disappointed. They will find accurately checked and clearly stated facts organized into cogent arguments defining and supporting what most Protestants know as the American way in regard to church-state relations. Yet the treatment of these topics, though forthright, is comparatively brief. Dr. Dawson sees these controversial issues in a larger framework than that of an issue between Protestants and Roman Catholics on such matters as public money for parochial schools and an ambassador to the Vatican, important as these are. Beyond the borders of this familiar field of controversy his mind ranges more widely and delves deeper to consider how the fundamental principles of our national life should express themselves in an "American way" of dealing with the problems of capital and labor, peace and war, marriage and the home, the treatment of racial minorities, the menace of secularism, and the relation of individual civil liberties to the social order."