

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS

April 1954

With this issue Report from the Capital resumes its monthly appearance, now from the pen of the new executive director. In the issues that are to come particular emphases may change somewhat, but the broad theme and purpose will remain the same.

THREE CAUSES FOR PERSONAL GRATITUDE

To have been selected by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs to serve as executive director for the Committee is a high honor which I greatly appreciate. I am frankly pleased to have been called to a post in which I can serve practically the whole Baptist fellowship at one and the same time. Our noble history as a Baptist people under the leading of God, our present day task in the service of Christ, and our potential for the future of His glory, are all so splendid that I am glad to enter into all of the groups that comprise the Baptist household of faith.

After twenty-six years of entrenchment in education and in the middle west, Mrs. Carlson and I found it necessary to move to Washington. To uproot ourselves from most pleasant associations and venture into this new experience seemed at first somewhat forbidding. However, so much friendliness has been showered upon us, at both ends of the road, that we now look back on these months as some of the most pleasant and enjoyable of our lives. Words, letters, acts of kindness, prayers, and receptions have buoyed us up and given us new appreciation of the warmth of Christian associations. In all of these, Dr. and Mrs. Edward B. Willingham have played a most gracious and generous role.

As I first looked at this post of service I realized that I could never bring myself to ask for the opportunity. On the other hand, neither could I bring myself to the point of refusing to try. Since making my commitment to the work, I have attended mid-year meetings of the American Baptist Convention at Green Lake, of the Baptist General Conference at Chicago, of the Southern Baptist Convention at Nashville, Tenn. In all of these and in other contacts, I have been delighted with the warm spiritual concern for the work of this Joint Committee. Down deep, below the regionalism handed down by history and below the resulting differences of emphases, is a solidarity of personal commitment to the living of the Christian life in such manner that our fellow citizens and our fellowmen everywhere may benefit by the good works to which we have been redeemed in Christ.

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A FRAME OF REFERENCE

Something of the executive director's approach to the problems of his new office can be seen from the following quotation from his first report to the Joint Committee.

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Faith Works

The person who thoughtfully attempts to apply Christian faith and truth to public affairs today does not expect either easy nor quick answers. During the past several decades Protestantism has tended to flow in two more or less separate channels or traditions. The one has emphasized the preaching of a personal gospel designed to bring the individual to an experience of the new-birth, into forgiveness of sin and personal fellowship with the Lord. Sometimes this emphasis has viewed salvation as redemption from an iniquitous world order of social life and has asked the Christian to be careful of contamination. In the other channel has flowed a social reform movement working optimistically for a kingdom of God which would consist of an ideal set of social institutions and a correct arrangement of people within them. At their extremes the one had no place for the world in which we live and the other had no place for the Lord. The one was without program on this side of heaven, the other was without power beyond man's resources. The church that is simply part of the social order has nothing to give to that order, and the church that is not a part of it at all has no opportunity to give.

Optimism

One of the encouraging lines of thought at present is the hope that these two traditions are now merging into a common channel. If it can be increasingly true that the experience of the new birth is literally salvation unto good works, and that the rule of God becomes effective in motivation and life planning, which takes account broadly of human needs, individually and in groups, I believe we would be justified in calling it revival.

Ever since the days of the depression some of us have thought we could see a rising tide of religiosity in America. The confidence and the arrogance which were current in academic circles in the 1920's have gradually declined until many of the scientists of our own day are "seekers" in a new and a better sense. Conversely, the Christian fellowships which do not now emphasize social action of some pattern as a normal result of personal religious experience are few and small. However, we are far from agreement as to what the pattern should be.

A Baptist Opportunity

We as Baptists have peculiar problems in all of these matters, but we also have peculiar advantages springing out of our distinctive tradition. Our heritage is clearly one of pietism in the better meaning of the term. We have never been an "established church", either politically, nor socio-economically. Our message and our churches have been for the common people, based on the Kingdom of God through personal experience of salvation. The competence of the individual to understand the Bible and to live a God-directed life by personal guidance of the Holy Spirit, the significance of the local fellowship of believers and the democratic control of that fellowship, are all important or basic premises for a spiritual impact on public affairs in a democratic social order.

These and other items in our history have contributed greatly in days past to a right understanding of the principles which must be respected if a social order is to conserve its potential for spiritual direction. Nevertheless, we have our own peculiar problems to face now and have need of the same power and the same discernment for effective Christian living. A legal defense of the institutions built by our founding fathers would be a poor substitute for dynamic spiritual living in the midst of the problems and affairs of our own day.

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THE WAY OUT -- an interpretation of the news.

The Washington Post-Times Herald on March 26, 1954 carried a front page report of a Republican conference seeking a "way out of the box," in the McCarthy feud with the government. Getting out, however, means taking stock of what you are in.

What schemes and dreams have influenced the mind of Senator Joseph H. McCarthy to make him ill-tempered and impatient in his investigative proceedings we will probably never know. His reaction pattern, however, is not unusual among men who, when thwarted by some one else's interests, explode because they see their personal future as being at stake. Some people like explosive leadership for it gives a sense of action. Some dislike it because they believe it prevents constructive action.

Whatever the personal side might be, the party interests are quite obvious. McCarthy was held to be an "asset" to the Republican party because the leaders hoped that he could, by means of a much publicized attack on "Communists" regardless of vintage, carry a sizeable segment of the Roman Catholic vote over to the Republican party. At the same time it was hoped that the effort would appeal to the extreme right. Just a few months ago men who are active in Republican political planning were rejoicing that McCarthy was a Republican and not a Democrat. Recently that rejoicing has subsided. What has happened? Well, here is one guess:

Apparently McCarthy's plans were based on bargaining at high levels. On the strength of those bargains he went to work, but in his enthusiasm he over-reached himself and his party. The Roman Catholic laity are too appreciative of American freedom to discard it lightly. When McCarthy decided to put pressures on the Army, then the President, and finally the leaders of Congress, inward doubt became outward dissent. The Roman Catholic man on the street became dubious. The Republican party became embarrassed and endangered by division. So now the question is, which way is out?

The National Catholic Welfare Conference is also seeking a way out by a belated recognition that there is a difference between having been a communist back in the 1930s and being one in 1954. Now that the scheme's wreckage is in full view, the associate director of the N.C.W.C. has called for the declaration of a "general amnesty" for those who were members of the Communist party or of its "front groups" in past years. Now he can also see that "We gain nothing by ruining reputations through recalling associations that have been long since rejected - - -". He even warns that Congressional investigators should define their terms. In short, the N.C.W.C. is now rejecting "McCarthyism," even though they still have McCarthy.

The Republican party continues to seek its way out. It proposes to have a neutral investigation of the fracas between the Army and Senator McCarthy. America will smile, in spite of the high price we are paying in terms of reputation abroad. Nonetheless, we hope the investigation succeeds and that the party chieftains can gather around a constructive legislative program before election time.

Some of the voters in Wisconsin, McCarthy's home state, think the way out is to use the "recall" on their junior senator. A "recall" petition is being circulated with signatures rapidly accumulating. The Progressive magazine, published in Madison, Wisconsin, has announced that its April issue will be a 96-page carefully documented account of Senator McCarthy's career. As a Washington observer this writer will be interested in seeing how the facts look "back home."

THERE IS A DIFFERENCE

A good illustration of the distinction between sectarianism on the one hand and devotion to God on the other, came to the attention of the recent meeting of the Joint Committee. A sergeant stationed in Germany, with a hand for art and heart for the Lord, sent in a proposed design for a postage stamp bearing the inscription "In God we trust for defense". That frame of mind is worthy of our government.

On the other hand, Senator Humphrey of Minnesota has agreed to sponsor a stamp recognizing the Roman Catholic, "Marian Year". This is clearly sectarian and caters to the publicity aims of a small segment of the American population. As Baptists we are opposed to making our government an advertizing tool for any particular religious group; we will even oppose a Baptist postage stamp. But we will constantly call upon our nation to humbly recognize our national and spiritual dependence upon God.

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VATICAN REPRESENTATION AGAIN

At the March meeting of the Joint Committee the issue regarding representation at the Vatican was raised again as a result of the publication of the opinions of Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith favoring such representation.

The Committee adopted a very clear resolution re-affirming "unalterable opposition," and deploring the injection of this controversial issue at a time when the American people are plagued by disunity and controversy.

The reply of the State Department, over the signature of John Wesley Jones, Director, Office of Western European Affairs, is conveyed in the following paragraph.

"In expressing appreciation of your views, which have been most carefully considered, the Department advises that at present it is not planned to establish representation at the Vatican."

Evidently the great body of Americans who favor our tradition of separation of church and state need to be continually alert in the event that our State Department should again need to know what the people think. Reports of plans persist here in Washington.

SOCIAL SECURITY FOR MINISTERS

Hearings before the House Ways and Means Committee on H. R. 7199 will begin about April 1st. This bill includes the Administration's proposal to extend social security rights to ministers.

The Executive Director has been in several conferences recently which have been designed to iron out the differences among the several religious groups before any testimony is presented to the Committee. There is now a general agreement that ministers should not be asked to forego their rights as citizens simply because they are clergymen.

A number of spokesmen have expressed the wish that the clergy might be treated as "self-employed," thus avoiding a contract between the church and government. However, such contracts are already in existence with reference to lay workers in the church so the bill now simply proposes to admit the ministers on the same arrangement. A number of very real problems arise from the viewpoint of the government if "self-employment" were to be so defined as to cover the clergy.