

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS



The American Baptist Convention
The Southern Baptist Convention
The National Baptist Convention of America
The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.
The North American Baptist General Conference
The Baptist General Conference of America



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This monthly newsletter is sent free to editors, executives, and institutions. In order to cover cost of production and mailing a charge of \$1.00 per year is made to all others.

July 1954

ON IMPRESSING LEGISLATORS

Both the Southern Baptist Convention at St. Louis and the American Baptist Convention in Minneapolis adopted new statements favoring legislation against liquor advertising. These statements have no doubt been placed on file by the proper agencies of each Convention.

The Director of the Joint Committee, however, had opportunity to appear personally before the Committees on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, first to file a statement in the House in behalf of the Bryson Bill and then in the Senate in favor of the Langer Bill. I told them about the resolutions, about the reasons for our opposition, and that our Joint Committee consists of delegations from several Baptist Conventions, totally about eighteen million. Were they impressed? Not that I know! What was lacking? Would a longer statement, more eloquently drafted have helped? Will more and better resolutions do the job? Hardly.

The thing that impresses a legislator or a legislative Committee or even a House is not the formal documents but the grass-roots evidence of concern among the voters among whom they will campaign soon for re-election. This is not in any sense a criticism of our men in Congress. It is simply a statement of the democratic process in our country.

If there is no concern among the voters in a Congressman's district he will accomplish no good by going out and standing alone as a man of courage only to be defeated in the next election. If public service is a man's work under God, there is no merit in political suicide.

How, then, can a Congressman know what the concerns and desires are among his people back home? In this he has no mystery gadget, he must go by what they tell him. The brewers, the bar-tenders, the publications are all organized and ready to tell the representatives what their viewpoints are--that is, to create a volume of mail on the subject of liquor advertising. If that is the only mail on the subject we have no right to criticize our legislators for assuming that to favor such legislation would be to thwart public opinion back home. We are millions and we have convictions, but we are the silent millions.

What is lacking? Adequate organization is lacking by means of which to let our people know that there is a Bryson Bill, and a Langer Bill, to let them know who the Committee members are, and who their own representatives are. Is not this unfinished business for the Lord?

LOYALTIES -- INTEGRATED BUT SEPARATED

Jews and Baptists do not usually have serious differences regarding church-state relations. Our Jewish friends take the spiritual principles of the Old Testament seriously and we Baptists focus on the New Testament principles, and the result usually is that we are not far apart in our positions on church-state matters. However, there are differences among them just as there are differences among us.

Religious News Service for June 18, 1954 reported an address by Rabbi Ira Eisenstein of New York, a representative of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, which as quoted certainly does not represent our thinking, and, I hope, not theirs either.

Rabbi Eisenstein discussed the "dilemma" of Americans who are devoted to the principle of church-state separation, but who are also concerned with growing secularism and materialism.

"The only solution to this dilemma," he said, "is to develop the concept of an American faith. Such a faith would articulate the fundamental moral and spiritual values of democratic living and symbolize them in observances and rituals based upon the 'sancta' of American life; its great heroes, events and literature."

Rabbi Eisenstein said that such a faith would not be sectarian because it would not exclude anyone. Rather, he explained, it would be the common heritage of all Americans.

"Our task today," he said, "is to spiritualize our American civilization and transform it into a powerful religious force so that it may serve as the antidote to Communism, Fascism, and other contemporary false religions of cruelty and power."

A recently published book on education also advocates the deepening of the "religious consciousness of the American Idea." The author believes that the nation's schools could "become what they of right should be--the meeting houses of the religion of democracy."

Such confusion of religion and patriotism, of religious faith and political theory, is too common in this enlightened age. Some even confuse their religion with their particular ideas on economics. For many democracy is their religion. Such confusion threatens to throw us back to the situation of the days of "divine right of rulers" when monarchy and Christianity were practically synonymous terms. Apparently we are not yet clear that to love your country, to believe in its political organization, to be happy with its economic and social institutions is something altogether different from living in a true relationship to God and to be fully devoted to Him. Certainly there were some good Christians in the days of the monarchs, but their Christianity did not consist either in their loyalty to the monarch nor in a desire to change the form of the government to a democracy.

Loyalty to God, that is, complete and full devotion to His leading, makes a person a constructive citizen always. Being constructive, however, at times requires advocating improvements in the social institutions, at the same time as we use the situations we are in to the greatest possible good for our fellowmen.

The separation of church and state rests on the recognition that loyalties can be on different planes and need not be mutually exclusive. A man is not less loyal to his family because he is wholly loyal to his country, nor is a man less loyal to his country because he is wholly devoted to his God. If these loyalties are placed alongside of each other and are viewed as being on the same plane they become an "either-or" delusion, or they become synonymous, creating intellectual and spiritual problems. That is what happens when people's religion prevents them from saluting the flag or taking an oath. That is also the basis for confusing patriotism for religion.

When patriotism breaks through and becomes a person's religion as well, then you have totalitarianism. The political unit, or the political system, has become the supreme and ultimate good before which individuals have no right to think or to hold divergent convictions. Hearts and minds are asked to give all on the social or political level and so to deify the institutions. Only thus can atheism or any other religious position become "official."

It was this kind of confusion of government with religion that caused Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den. It was this same confusion which caused so many Christians in the first century to be thrown to the lions in the Roman arena. It was this kind of confusion which gave Europe its well known "Inquisition" carried out by the cooperative efforts of a church-state union. This same kind of union is now giving us persecution policies in Spain, in Italy, and in Colombia. Some would like to fuse government and religion into one instrument for the regimenting of the hearts and the minds of Americans as well. Can we not learn from history?

In the last analysis, when government and religion merge not only religious liberty disappears but civil liberty as well, and furthermore, when a person's religion comes to consist of appreciation for an institution or a set of institutions he has fixed his eyes on things that are human and not divine.

Note: Reference is to H. Gordon Hullfish, Educational Freedom in an Age of Anxiety - Chapter by Horace Kallen, Professor of Philosophy at New School for Social Research in New York City (Harpers)

FEDERAL AID TO SCHOOLS

Federal aid to public schools has been stymied for some time by a combination of political pressures. One of these is the political influence of the parochialists who contend that if Federal aid is granted it should provide for all schools, public and private.

If there is any one social institution which has made the United States the envy of foreign peoples it has undoubtedly been our free public school system. After the outlines of the system had developed, in connection with Northwest Ordinances and in the decades that

followed, it quickly became a major asset in the new land of the free. The booklets prepared for prospective immigrants told of the educational opportunities not just for the favored few but for all. They explained how the sixteenth section of the township was being set aside so the schools would always be free.

The immigrant correspondence was full of applause for our public secular school system and many families came to get the benefits. They recognized that the churches provided the religious education needed and that between the two, the church on one side and the state on the other, a superior type of citizen was being produced.

Three things should be kept clearly in mind by the present day American public in this regard. First, the immigrant parents of many present day parochialists deliberately chose America because of these free institutions and thereby escaped from the old-world methods.

Second, the comparative advances made by the nations that have adopted the free institutions, as compared with those retaining the old-world patterns (like Italy, Spain, and most of the South American countries) makes a good evaluation of the systems. It is true that many churches have been quite inadequate in their part of the program, but such failures should not be blamed on the public schools. It is strange indeed, that we should be asked to adopt the educational methods of the old world just at the time when those methods have produced such decay in their native lands that the Communists are ready to take over in several areas.

Third, while the operation of the public school system was placed in the hands of the state governments the federal government made financial provisions through land grants. More recently we have voted federal aid for roads, relief, airports, hospitals, and many other things, but not for public schools. Could it be that we have become less forward looking with the passing of the years?

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The current legislative session is not aiming to deal with the problems of education in any major way. Senator Hill's bill, et. al., to earmark oil revenues from the outer shelf beyond the tidelands for "education" is meaningless for the present except as it may have political significance. The sponsors have refused to use the term "public education" as being too narrow to suit present purposes.

Another minor educational proposal involves the suggestion of federal aid for schools in communities where the actions of the federal government have created unusual situations, e.g., near a defense plant.

Of larger significance for the future is H. R. 7601 which proposes a series of educational conferences, beginning with localities, then states, and culminating in a White House Conference. This last conference would bring the representatives together and utilize the data collected in all the state conferences.

The original bill proposed an appropriation of 1½ million dollars for the conferences. The House of Representatives in passing the bill on May 19 struck out the appropriation; the Senate version of the bill, passed June 17, restored it. Therefore, the bill must go to conference before final action is taken.