

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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A SUIT AGAINST THE TREASURER

A civil action complaint against Ivy Baker Priest, Treasurer of the United States, was recently filed in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia in an effort to stop the use of public money for the support of chaplains in the armed services. Since many who do not want separation of church and state are frequently pressing the statement that absolute separation is neither possible nor desirable, this complaint merits careful study as to its pattern of reasoning.

Nothing is absolute in human experience but this should not be used to block or frustrate intensive effort in the direction of those principles which have proved most productive of spiritual discernment and human welfare. There are a number of institutional relations that should be carefully analyzed so as to find the answers based on sound principles or so as to adjust them on principle.

The action was brought by Frank C. Hughes of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mr. Hughes is an elderly atheist, held by some who know him personally to be a man of sincere convictions. He reasons as follows:

"1. The action arises under the 'establishment of religion' clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

"2. The United States has in its employ and on its payrolls, in the Armed Forces and other departments of Government, thousands of persons called Chaplains, engaged to teach and practice religion.

"3. The employment of such Chaplains is contrary to The Constitution of the United States as set forth by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), 330 U.S. 1, and reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of the United States in *McCullum v. Board of Education* (1948), 333 U.S. 203, as follows:

"The 'establishment of religion' clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from

church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance. 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. Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa. In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect 'a wall of separation between church and state.'

"4. In the payment of Federal Income Taxes, plaintiff is forced to pay a part of the salaries and allowances to Chaplains on the Federal payroll, in violation of that part of the Everson decision quoted in Paragraph 3 above which provides that '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.'

"5. The revenue to pay the cost of Chaplains in the service of the United States comes, in part at least, from taxes. In paying Income Taxes assessed against him, plaintiff is forced to pay a part of the cost of promulgating religious doctrines which he abhors, and is obliged to support, financially, religion entirely alien to his own. Thus plaintiff is denied the freedom of religion guaranteed under Amendment I of The Constitution of the United States.

"Wherefore plaintiff demands that the defendant, her officers, agents, servants, employees, and their successors in office be permanently enjoined by this Honorable Court from paying any salaries or allowances from the funds of the United States Government to any Chaplain, active or retired, employed or previously employed by the United States to teach or practice religion."

A NEW COLOMBIAN ORDER

New difficulties seem to be in store for Protestants in Colombia. A report from Colombia indicates that on October 11, 1955 a government order was issued directing governors and mayors of that nation "to punish exemplarily" non-Catholics who show a lack of respect for the Roman Catholic religion. The order is quoted as follows:

"This is to confirm the instructions contained in Circulars 310-R and 1785 of last year, pertaining to the labors permitted to pastors of non-Catholic religions and nationals or foreigners affiliated with those sects. At the same time I am recommending careful vigilance in order that such persons strictly observe the respect which is due the Catholic religion. This Ministry has proof that many of them are distributing leaflets offensive to the Roman Pontiff, the Catholic clergy, and the mysteries and practices of our religion. This is equivalent to an attack on the finest characteristics of the national spirit and a clear

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disturbance of the public order. Such acts must be exemplarily punished as police cases. Please acknowledge receipt. Sincere greetings.

LUCIO PABON NUNEZ,
Minister of Government."

Obviously this order uses language which can be defined so as to permit free police action in almost any kind of activity by non-Catholics, and could involve the simple omission of ritualistic courtesies to the clergy.

The report credits the Bishops of Colombia with a clearer understanding of the nature of Colombia's moral crisis. A collective pastoral letter dated October 7, 1955 says:

"The real cause of the tremendous moral crisis which the Colombian people are suffering lies solely and exclusively in their departure from God. They have separated themselves from Him, from His commandments, from His gospel, from His sacraments, from His grace, and from His love; they have paid no attention to the voices of His pastors nor to the maternal cries of the Church, and therefore (they suffer) such public and private calamities."

The Bishops enumerate specific evils to emphasize the seriousness of the moral crisis in Colombian life:

"The Lord's Day is not sanctified; men do not love one another as they should; there is no respect for nor obedience of the legitimate authorities; the rights of others are not respected, not even the most precious of all natural gifts--life (itself); the sacredness of marriage is not respected, and the obligation to give a Christian education to children is forgotten; the virtue of purity is despised and modesty in dress, in conversations, and in customs in general has become a word without meaning for a great many persons."

The Bishops then discuss three great evils which are afflicting Colombia: "drunkenness, homicide, and thievery, sins which constitute the fatal cancer that is ruining the life of our people."

Once more the political eyes of the nation seem to view the spiritual situation with more optimism, seeing "the finest characteristics of the national spirit", while the responsible ecclesiastical eyes take a dim view. The long story of persecutions would seem to prove that the Bishops are right and that the preaching of the Gospel is much needed.

BAPTISTS IN RUSSIA

The interesting reports on Baptist work in Russia given by our team of missionary representatives who conducted a preaching tour of Russia this past summer have been confirmed by three prominent non-Baptist voices.

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Mr. Robert F. Kennedy, chief counsel of the Senate Investigations Subcommittee and brother of Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, came back saying that the Baptists have become "surprisingly" strong in Russia. Mr. Kennedy is a member of a family which has been very generous in Roman Catholic philanthropic efforts.

Mr. Clarence E. Pickett, executive secretary emeritus of the Friends' Service Committee, on his return from a month's trip to Russia, pictured a religious boom in the Soviet Union comparable to the one in the United States except for the lack of new church construction.

Mr. Pickett said that in the Russian churches he visited, notably the Baptist, tremendous collection bags were used which were quickly stuffed with ruble notes of various denominations, then emptied and filled again. Most of the notes appeared to be 1-ruble notes worth 10 cents, but he said he also saw many 10-ruble notes, and a few 100-ruble ones.

He reported that the many Baptist churches he visited were all "crowded to the gills" with worshippers in some instances trying to hear the services from outside open windows.

Dr. Charl Ormond Williams, formerly president of the National Education Association, has also toured extensively in Russia, covering approximately 10,000 miles. In a letter addressed to the Director of this office and to Dr. J. M. Dawson, the former Director, telling of an experience on October 16, 1955, she says in part:

"On that day I got an Intourist car and driver and set out alone to find the only Baptist Church in Moscow. Before I left Moscow for a long journey to the southern part of Russia I ordered a guide and a car for the same purpose. That young woman guide told me flatly that there was no service on that day. I felt sure that was not true, but I decided to find it for myself. I insisted in my feeble Russian that he keep asking where it was until we finally located the church. It was not possible to get inside the church at the front door because of the crowd of people at the entrance. Very soon an elderly man spied me and beckoned me to follow him through several rooms in the church until he finally led me to the high pulpit where the preacher was in the middle of his sermon. My entrance was apparently unnoticed though I did feel a bit conspicuous. I was glad to have that place for I could look into the faces of the people and see the excellent choir. Every seat was taken, people stood on both stairways to the balcony and many stood during that two-hour service inside the railing around the pulpit. The choir, of about 50 consisted of young men and women who sang beautifully the classic hymns in the Russian tradition directed by a choir leader and aided by a pipe organ.

"I have visited many Russian churches, and I noted that very few people were in them--and that these were very old and very poor. So you can readily understand the impression this Baptist Church made on me--especially when I learned that there are 5,000 Baptist Churches in the Soviet Union, and 500,000 members."