

# 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



1628 16th Street, N.W., Washington 9, D.C. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ C. EMANUEL CARLSON, Ph.D., Executive Director

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.

February 1956

### EDUCATION AND THE PUBLIC MIND

A year ago President Eisenhower suggested grants to the states for use in building public schools in the amount of \$200,000,000 to be spread over a three-year period. Now, in 1956, the President suggests \$250,000,000 per year for a five-year period, making a total of \$1,250,000,000 in grants. Both messages contain a recommendation for \$750,000,000 for the purchase of unmarketable school bonds and other minor aids to the public school program.

The text of the President's message makes it clear that the White House Conference on Education has done its work. Speaking of the four thousand state and local conferences held throughout 1955 and the culminating White House Conference, the President said:

"... The work of the conferences has aroused the Nation. The final report of the White House Conference Committee should receive wide and serious attention.

"Benefits already are apparent. About half a million people across the Nation, representing all segments of life, came to grips with the problems of education. The status of American education--where it is; the future of American education--where it should and can go--have been illuminated as perhaps never before. Most important of all, there has been a reawakening of broad public interest in our schools. The conferences helped to erase the corroding notion that schools were the other person's responsibility."

Many of the friends of increased federal aid to public education had looked upon the White House Conference plan as being a means of stalling and of gaining support for the administration's position that large scale federal aid is not needed. This interpretation was bolstered by a report from a study group of the President's Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. The study group had said in a February 1955 report: "Federal aid is not necessary for either current operating expenses for public schools or for capital expenditures for new school facilities." The report insisted that the states could afford to make more money available.

The full year of public discussion, however, turned up a different conclusion, as represented by the President's new recommendation.

In these discussions it became apparent that all states have an abundance of "wealth." This wealth in the form of land, forests, buildings, factories, highways, and so forth does not automatically provide for the

support of education. The conversion of such wealth into income for the schools is prevented by such factors as: constitutional and legal limitations on tax rates, the inequitable assessment valuations, limitations resulting from the movement of people and industries out of the state if taxation becomes too heavy.

The real question that has come to face the American nation now is this, shall we put our national income, which is in excess of \$500 billion, back of our public school system as a source of support? It is estimated that at the present time we are spending less than 2 per cent of our national income for the education of the next generation.

The burden of support for education was placed upon real estate in the early days of our history when most everyone earned his livelihood from the land. Now that 11 per cent of our population work the land for the production of our food supply, the traditional real estate tax has become an inequitable and inadequate economic base for the support of education. The state governments have stepped into the picture to equalize the burden within the states. However, states cannot tax income to any appreciable degree lest the corporations and the people involved leave the state. The net result of the many factors involved is that the state of Oregon spends more than \$10,000 on the average for the operation of a classroom while the state of Mississippi spends \$2,400 for the operation of its classrooms. The other 46 states range in a continuous spread between these two extremes.

Even though the federal government alone can effectively tax income, and therefore becomes the collecting agency, this does not prevent local responsibility for and democratic control of the schools. On this there was no uncertainty in the White House Conference, and the President's recommendations fully sanction our traditional principles.

Not only did the White House Conference make a significant contribution to the administration's understanding of the public mind with reference to increased federal aid to education, but the whole series of conferences contributed greatly toward the public understanding of the problems and issues which confront our schools. The need for more qualified teachers, the low salary scales, the need for better district organization, the need for more concern and interest on the part of the public, and the need for a clearer understanding of what we may justly expect of our schools were among the many topics for extended discussions.

These discussions on the national level had back of them 53 conferences at the state and territorial level and back of these thousands of local educational conferences. In this way the American public mind gave itself on an unprecedented scale to the consideration of the nation's educational needs.

In this total national conversation several conclusions stand out very clearly. First, in spite of derogatory efforts from several sources, the nation still believes in the public school system. Second, the nation does not consider it necessary to turn to parochialism in order to give adequate expression to the rising tide of religious concern among the people. Third, the democratic process still works when we take the time and the effort needed for thorough consideration of public issues.

The future might well look upon the White House Conference as a landmark in the development of new mechanics for the distillation of public opinion. It is quite obvious that a combination of modern discussion tech-

February 1956

niques, using both the small and the large group methods, can produce a consensus which does not readily grow out of the customary party debates. There are a number of issues that could stand a White House Conference approach.

The time might also come when these techniques can add a new strength of solidarity to democratically minded religious fellowships such as our Baptist conventions.

#### A SOURCE OF TENSION IN THE NEAR EAST

The Religious News Service recently carried a digest of the religion clauses contained in Egypt's new constitution. They run as follows:

Preamble: "We, the Egyptian people...assured of freedom of thought and worship in an atmosphere where there are no dictates save those of conscience and reason..."

Article 3: "Islam is the religion of the State and Arabic is its official language."

Article 5: "The State guarantees liberty, security, safety and equality of opportunity for all Egyptians."

Article 6: "The family is the fundamental unit in society and its basic constituents are religion, morality and patriotism."

Article 31: "Equality of all Egyptians is established by law. They are equal in respect of rights and obligations without discrimination on account of race, origin, language, religion or creed."

Article 43: "Freedom of worship is unrestricted. The State guarantees free religious practices in accordance with established usage in Egypt providing this does not conflict with public order and morality."

These clauses are worth reading a second time. In fact, they are worthy of very careful analysis because they illustrate some basic premises which have caused much stagnation and suffering in many nations.

In Article 3 Islam is declared to be the religion of the State just as Arabic is its language. Both are viewed as being integral parts of the culture, and definable by means of a constitution.

Few nationalists in any country would be so zealous as to contend that language is not culture, i.e., on the human level. While capacity for language is a divine endowment, the particular language in use is of human construction and handed down by instruction from generation to generation with gradual changes. But, is that the nature of "religion"?

Obviously there are social institutions, customs, mores, and conventions in society which pertain to religious activities and these are definable just as language is. On this level of experience governments for centuries past have defined the manner of "worship", the wording of "creeds", and the content of "prayers." But such culture traits do not necessarily involve a relationship to God. As we understand Divine revelation, God comes into the picture by faith, by responsiveness. This meaning of "religion" cannot be put into a constitution, neither does it lend itself to legislation nor administration by any government.

The provision for religious liberty in Article 43 deals in "freedom of worship" and sets it "in accordance with established usage in Egypt", and providing it should not conflict with "public order and morality."

Here again the frame of reference is the established social order. There is no recognition that there may be a God who is too great to adjust Himself to our human culture patterns, nor is there any recognition that our culture patterns may be deeply iniquitous, injurious to our own best interests, and under the judgment of God.

True religious liberty arises out of the purpose of God for people. It is a human right. With such freedom a state religion of any kind is incongruous.

No one who is even mildly informed about the Near East is offering any easy or simple solutions to the tensions that prevail in the area. Dr. Ephraim A. Speiser, professor of Semitics at the University of Pennsylvania, struck at the roots of many of the problems when he called for complete separation of church and state in the Islamic countries.

In a talk at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, he is reported by Religious News Service as saying:

"Progressive elements throughout the Muslim world have long recognized that what is needed, instead of scapegoats and diversionary targets, is religious reform as the first step of social reform.

"The example of Turkey has borne this out. Once the proverbial sick man of Europe, Turkey did not start out on its way back to health until Church and State had been separated so that each could function without undue interference from the other. No lasting improvement can be looked for in the other Islamic States until each has acted with like honesty and resoluteness."

"Behind the mass poverty that points up the sick state of the Islamic communities today lies the ominous factor of social and cultural stagnation. Education in theocratic States is of necessity slanted, limited and reactionary. Political progress and international relations are hampered by numerous injunctions that were anachronisms a thousand years ago. The organic weakness of Islamic society, in short, stems from temporal features of the dominant religious system."

#### Briefs--

The Department of Agriculture reported that 18 religious and voluntary agencies sent 541,900,000 pounds of surplus dairy products and cottonseed oil to needy persons in other countries during the twelve-month period ending last June 30.

No one seems disposed to press for action on the Haitian treaty at the present time. An election year may well be the wrong time for discussion on this proposal.