

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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September 1956

APPLICATIONS ACCEPTED

The forms are now ready by means of which religious groups may file claims before the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission of the United States to carry out the amendment approved August 6, 1956. Groups that aim to benefit by the revision of Public Law 997 may make their applications from August 6, 1956 to midnight February 6, 1957.

The law was amended to provide for the \$8,000,000 claims being pressed by Representative John W. McCormack of Massachusetts and others in behalf of the Archbishop of Manila. (See Report from the Capital, August, 1956.) To take away the appearance of a sectarian grant, the bill provided for a new six month period of application. Some are predicting that the claims will now be reworked and that they may go much higher. Few Protestant claims are anticipated.

According to the Federal Register of August 25, 1956, eligible claimants under the act are now limited to "religious organizations functioning in the Philippines and of the same denomination as a religious organization functioning in the United States which furnished relief as described..."

This vocabulary is so broad that it is at present difficult to know where the limits will be drawn. An attempted clarification in the Federal Register says:

"The term 'religious organization functioning in the Philippines' for purposes of section 7 (h) of the act, means any church, sect, denomination, religious order or congregation, or any group, body, corporation, association or other entity formed for religious purposes, professing and adhering to the tenets of some particular religious faith or form of worship and which maintained under its auspices in the Philippine Islands, on or after December 7, 1941, a church, chapel, or other place of divine worship or a religious house, community, mission, convent or facilities for divine worship, or operated a school, dormitory, hospital, dispensary, orphanage or other like institutions under religious auspices; or any part, division or association of such churches, sects, denominations, religious orders, congregations, groups, bodies, corporations or entities."

September 1956

The Federal Register defines the vocabulary of the act for administrative purposes, developing the concepts "Expenditures incurred", "Fair value of supplies used", "Furnishing shelter, food, clothing, hospitalization, medicines, and medical services and other relief", "Members of the armed forces of the United States", and other phrases.

The non-American religious organizations in the Philippine Islands now face the problem of deciding whether or not to dip into the American public treasury to reimburse themselves for their acts of charity to American troops.

GOVERNMENT AND PERSONAL DEVOTION

At 4:18 P.M. on August 30, 1956 Proclamation 3150 was filed, bearing the signatures of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, setting aside September 12, 1956 as a "National Day of Prayer."

"NOW, THEREFORE, I, DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, President of the United States of America, in consonance with the Congressional resolution, do hereby proclaim Wednesday, September 12, 1956, as a National Day of Prayer, on which all of us, in our places of business, in our places of worship, in our homes, and in our hearts, may beseech God to continue to watch over us in our daily lives and in the conduct of our national affairs. Let us also render thanks to Him for the manifold bounties vouchsafed us throughout our history.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States of America to be affixed."

The President has this authority to call the nation to prayer. In fact, he was instructed to do so by Resolution of Congress, adopted on April 17, 1952. It is not difficult to imagine a steady expansion of the religious functions of our presidency until we have practically, if not in reality, a head of an "American church."

It should also be borne in mind that we now have a new "national motto."

From the House of Representatives record of Monday, April 16, 1956:

"Resolved, etc., That the national motto of the United States is hereby declared to be 'In God we trust.'"

The Senate record on July 23 is longer and explains, in part:

"It will be of great spiritual and psychological value to our country to have a clearly designated national motto of inspirational quality in plain, popular accepted English."

Few Americans would want to oppose either prayer or a religious slogan and certainly no one in public life would be expected to register such opposition. Many Baptists, however, will ask, "What do these things

September 1956

mean?" Do people pray because of government proclamations? Do people "trust" because of a national motto? How are these things related to spiritual experience?

If there should be some who admittedly do not trust in God nor pray to Him, are they now slightly "un-American"? May we now accept these positions as personal testimonies of our legislators and executives? Might we expect to reduce armaments, raise our ethics, or adjust our national policies by virtue of such expressions?

The new motto replaces "E pluribus unum", which was our former motto. We hope our unity is not endangered by the repeal of the motto. Probably not, for the Senate committee said that "few people know what it means."

U.S. AND UN

The President's report to the Congress on U.S. Participation in the UN for 1955 has just been published by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C. (Price, 70¢)

The report tells the story of the year's efforts in the continuing search for peace and records the progress made toward the relief of suffering and the improvements of health and well-being.

Many of our readers will be particularly interested in the section describing the work in the fields of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The sections dealing with prevention of crime, narcotic drug control, the children's fund, and the health organization will be of high interest.

The 1956 United Nations emphasis in the United States is scheduled for October 24th.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

The photo-finish race between Senators Kefauver and Kennedy in the Chicago convention was as exciting as any good athletic event. Even though a person knew nothing of the strategies back of the score-board and had no knowledge of the game plans, yet the closeness and the speed of the game were exciting.

A wave of editorializing and speculation had been set off some weeks before the convention when the backers of Senator Kennedy decided to use his religion as a major argument for his selection. Kennedy is well known as a member of a leading Roman Catholic family. A report was prepared and released (carried in U.S. News & World Report, August 10, 1956) purporting to show that there is a large "Catholic vote" and that this vote is so located as to constitute a balance-of-power element in the national electorate.

This report took the position that "there is, or can be, such a thing as a 'Catholic vote' whereby a high proportion of Catholics of all

September 1956

ages, residences, occupations, and economic status vote for a well-known Catholic candidate or a ticket with special Catholic appeal."

The report also argued that "the Catholic vote is far more important than its numbers--about one in every four voters who turn out--because of its concentration in the key states and cities of the North." In support of this evaluation the authors ascribed the Democratic victories of 1940, 1944, 1948 to this vote, and so also the Democratic defeat in 1952.

A study in the same publication on August 17th showed that the facts are not as simple as the Kennedy backers had painted them. The arm-chair political analyst would normally assume that many of the southern delegations read only the first of these reports, but some day a study may show that these facts are not so simple, either, as they appear.

Do people "vote their religion?" is the question that politicians and writers have sought to answer, and that is a question which deserves discussion, at least until the nation comes to a better understanding of the numerous meanings possible in that phrase.

If we use the term religion to include the patterns of conviction, of association, and of behavior which are tied into the person's spiritual commitment, then obviously everyone "votes" whatever religion he has. From this viewpoint Al Smith's attitude toward the liquor industry is correctly seen as part of his "religion." From this viewpoint, also, we would hope that all Christians have a distinctive way of voting, thereby reflecting their response to the righteousness of God and to the "royal law of love."

The freedom of the democratic process, however, meets its test at the point of interpretation and application. If, in the name of religion, one person is placed under the authority and discipline of another person and that discipline is extended to cover points of public policy, then the democratic process has broken down. The problem then is that the voter "votes" not his own "religion" but that of some one else. Under this kind of relationship the millions can go to the voting booth simply to rubber stamp the "party line."

Many of the more liberal Roman Catholic writers in the United States are aware of the dangers involved in this "bloc" formation process. One bloc tends to produce other blocs. Hence with one voter out of four involved in the Roman Catholic positions, a "Roman Catholic bloc" known as such is most undesirable to them. The consolidation of viewpoints in their segment of the population, on the other hand, can give opportunity for bargaining and for "balance-of-power" influence.

The Roman Catholic church has a long history of political experience and a large body of political policy. The adjustments which are currently strategic in the United States are by no means compromises of that larger or longer record. While current situations are not ideal to the Roman church, they are on the path to those ideals and are grossly misunderstood if viewed outside of the context of that church's philosophy and objectives. For a true discernment, then, the American scene must be viewed against the background of Catholic and "Christian front" parties in other parts of the world, notably in Europe and in Latin America.