



# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

★ RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ★ BAPTIST PRINCIPLES

★ PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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## BAPTIST LEADERS GATHER FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY CONFERENCE

Ninety-five Baptist leaders from throughout the United States and Canada met in Washington, D. C., for the second annual Religious Liberty Conference. Involved were Baptist editors, executive secretaries, seminary presidents, public affairs committee members and a few other interested Baptists in responsible positions.

Five fellowships were represented in this group. They were Southern Baptist Convention, American Baptist Convention, Baptist General Conference of America, North American Baptist General Conference, and Baptist Federation of Canada.

The purpose of the Conference was to discuss the Biblical basis for religious liberty and the use of public funds by church agencies and institutions. The method employed was strictly "conference." The participants were assigned to discussion tables with about ten members each. Three discussion periods were used to discuss three sets of questions. A plenary session followed. Here are the questions confronted by these Baptist leaders.

### Discussion I - General Principles

1. Is there general agreement that churches and their agencies should rest on voluntary contributions and should not be supported by grants from tax funds?
2. Is there also general agreement that the advancement of religion and religious movements should be carried forward by voluntary contributions and should not be supported by grants or appropriations from tax funds?
3. What criteria would you use by means of which to sort out the institutions and

agencies which are eligible for public tax support from those which are ineligible for public funds? For example, ownership? Operating control? Functions performed? Amount or nature of service to the public?

### Discussion II - Government Grants

1. In applying the principles developed in Discussion I, would you furnish tax support for church agencies which are owned and operated by religious groups but which are not directly related to their religious ministry, being more directly involved in rendering services to the community, such as agencies for relief, for social welfare, or for medical research?

2. In applying your principles, would you provide for an institution's acceptance of (a) government funds which are paid to a person or family in order to make welfare or educational services available (e.g., rehabilitation payments); (b) funds paid by the government directly to the institution for services rendered to a specific person (e.g., for dependent children)?

3. What position should we take on indirect grants to church agencies such as those involved in free mailings and in preferential below-cost postal rates?

### Discussion III - Government Loans, Leases

1. Does your table look upon the acceptance of long-term housing construction loans by church colleges or schools of nursing as involving a violation of the religious liberty of the taxpayer? Do you look upon such loans as compromising the freedom of the schools?

2. Do your answers to No. 1 above hinge on any stipulations regarding the interest rate, the conditions in the contract, or the form of organization? If so, how do you state those stipulations?

3. Should a Baptist church which is destroyed or damaged by a natural disaster (such as flood, tornado, or earthquake) accept a government disaster loan for rebuilding?

4. Do you approve or disapprove of the leasing of public property for use by a church agency (e.g., a school house, or a hospital built by Hill-Burton grants and local tax funds)? Would you make any stipulations regarding the conditions and terms of the lease?

Since this was an informal meeting of Baptist leaders, and since the purpose of the meeting was for exchange of thinking, there were no "official" answers to the above questions and consequently no resolutions or formal positions were adopted.

#### Conference Next Year

A third Religious Liberty Conference is scheduled for the fall of 1959, sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The subject to be discussed will be "The Relation of the Churches to the Public Schools and the Place of Religion in Education." This will continue to be a discussion group within the Baptist family. Persons to be invited to the Conference will include representatives of the Boards of Education of the conventions cooperating with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, representatives of colleges and seminaries, workers in the field of public education, including school teachers, workers in religious education in the churches, some parents, Baptist educators, and chairmen or representatives of state Baptist public affairs committees.

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#### BAPTIST PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HAS SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs met in semi-annual session in Washington, D. C., Sept. 18-19. Officers for the new year are: Clarence W. Cranford, pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Washington, and past president of the American Baptist Convention, chairman; Walter Pope Binns, president of William Jewell College, Liberty, Mo., vice chairman; A. C. Miller, executive secretary,

Christian Life Commission, Southern Baptist Convention, secretary; Frank K. Brasington, pastor, First Baptist Church, Silver Spring, Md., treasurer; Ralph Cole, Washington layman, assistant treasurer.

The Baptist Public Affairs Committee is composed of representatives of six national Baptist Conventions, American Baptist Convention, Southern Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., North American Baptist General Conference, and Baptist General Conference of America.

The purpose of the Committee as stated in its constitution and approved by the cooperating conventions is "to act in the field of public affairs whenever the interests or rights of the cooperating conventions which constitute the Committee call for conference or negotiation with the Government of the United States or with any other Governments, or whenever Baptist principles are involved in, or jeopardized through governmental action, or when any of the cooperating Conventions or any of their agencies may refer to the Joint Committee any matter of common interest or concern, for consideration and recommendation.

Also, "The Baptist Joint Committee is empowered to enunciate, commend and defend the historic Baptist principle of religious freedom with particular application to the separation of church and state as embodied in the Constitution of the United States; to communicate and commend to the President, Congress, Courts and Departments of the Federal Government or state governments such declarations as Baptists from time to time officially adopt concerning public matters; to make such contacts with the various departments of any government as may be found necessary or desirable in the legitimate transaction of legal or other business between such government and the Baptist agencies or approved representatives; and to inform the Baptist constituencies of governmental movements and measures affecting principles held essential to true relations between church and state and the right application of Christianity to the life of the nation."

#### Civil Defense Position Renewed

Last year it was pointed out to the Baptist Public Affairs Committee that the Religious Affairs Office of the Federal Civil Defense Administration (now part of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization) wished to

provide moral and ideological help to combat atheistic communism, along with technical instruction in civil defense methods, for ministers and church groups. The proposal was to reach the clergy through a newsletter, staff college courses, area conferences, clip sheet service for sermons, papers, etc., and through appearances at conventions. The plan was also to reach the membership of the churches through such church channels as periodicals, Sunday School materials, mission society programs, etc.

In response to the above proposals the Baptist Public Affairs Committee approved the following resolution last fall and communicated it to the Religious Affairs Office of the Federal Civil Defense Administration: "As loyal American citizens we share with the Federal Civil Defense Administration in its concern for adequate preparedness for national emergencies. However, we believe it is the function of the churches in their own way to provide ideological and spiritual instruction for their members. We believe that the churches have done and will continue to do an efficient work in informing their people of the evils of atheism, materialistic philosophies and other ideologies that are inimical to our religious heritage and American way of life. This function should remain with the churches and should not become a function of the government."

At the recent meeting the Baptist Joint Committee took note of a continued ideological effort directed toward the churches. This includes the announcement of special civil defense briefings for church leaders and a "Civil Defense Briefing for Church Editors" to be held in Battle Creek, Michigan, Nov. 4-5, 1958. The stated purpose of the briefing is to give editors and writers background information for articles on civil defense and to gather from them guidance on the kind of informational and education material acceptable and usable by church publications. In addition to general instruction on the physical and organizational aspects of civil defense the church editors will be "briefed" on subjects "of particular interest to the church writers," as, "Ideological and Spiritual Phases, Clergy Organization and Operation, Psychological Problems, and Inter-Faith Mini-strations under Emergency Situations."

In the light of these continued developments the Baptist Public Affairs Committee renewed its resolution of last year and instructed the executive director to continue

conversations on the subject with the proper government officials.

#### Religious Question in Census

The question, "What is your religion?", as proposed by the Census Bureau, continues to be a live issue. Although the question has been ruled out in the 1960 census the doors remain open for it to be used in spot surveys and in a subsequent decennial census. The Baptist Public Affairs Committee reviewed correspondence between its executive director and the director of the Census and instructed him to continue to represent the position of the Committee in opposition to the use of the religious question in a Census by the government. Extended information as to why the Baptist Committee has taken this position will be available in the near future. (Also see the Sept., 1957, Report from the Capital.)

#### Reviews Christian Amendment

A little noticed but persistent problem of several years standing is the proposal in various forms to enact an amendment to the Constitution of the United States declaring that this is a Christian nation and that the law of Jesus Christ is the basic law of the land. Such a proposal has been introduced into the past several Congresses. Since Baptist legislators along with others have introduced these measures, questions might be raised in the minds of many concerning the Baptist position on religious liberty.

Because of renewed interest in this idea in many parts of the country the Baptist Public Affairs Committee is seeking again to inform its constituency as to the reasons why it has opposed the Christian Amendment. The executive director is in the process of preparing an analysis of the problem and a statement of reasons for opposition to the proposed Amendment.

In the meantime, a statement prepared by M. Searle Bates for the Religious Liberty Department of the National Council of Churches will be of interest to our readers.

#### Regarding the Proposed Constitutional Amendment 'For A Christian Nation'

By M. Searle Bates

"For the guidance of its officers in implementing its program and for referral to the Executive Committee of the Division of Chris-

tian Life and Work, the Department records its opposition to proposals currently agitated for a constitutional amendment intending to declare that "the United States is a Christian nation." Among the reasons for positions taken are the following:

"(1) A declaration of this purport confuses the nature and function of the nation-state with the nature and function of churches. It would increase the present difficulties of citizens in comprehending and in continuing healthy separation and sound relations between church and state.

"(2) Previous attempts to maintain 'Christian states,' in earlier centuries as well as in our own, have been fraught with great problems and have failed in disillusion. They have frequently denied general liberty, and religious liberty in particular, to all who did not belong to the dominant body of Christians. In the American scene today, a constitutional sanction for Christianity would tend to weaken the rights and liberties of Jews and others who are not Christians, and to lessen respect for their distinctive concerns.

"(3) The intended declaration would strengthen the hands of those who desire financial and other privileges for Christian churches ready and able to secure them -- such as support of school and welfare institutions, extended tax privileges for property and enterprises under Christian names.

"(4) The proposed amendment would embarrass our ecumenical relations and our missionary enterprises, also our general international relations as viewed by Christians and by the world majority of non-Christians, through officially attaching the Christian name to military, economic, and other acts and policies of the Government of the United States.

"(5) To declare the United States a Christian nation, in the churchman's sense of 'Christian,' is to assert less of truth than of pretension. That declaration could be partly justified if the term 'Christian' is degraded to the uses of loose social or cultural description. But the term rightly belongs to a significant religion, with biblical and theological meaning simply not applicable to the American nation in gross. Moreover, the proposal in question, if given

an aura of validity by incorporation in the Constitution, would tempt many unthinking church members to a complacent hypocrisy in their outlook upon society, national and international. In fine, it is perilous, even sacrilegious, to turn to the political forum for practical determination of the public meaning of the great word, 'Christian.' The church cannot share this word, central and peculiar to its character, with the nation-state."

#### Declaration of Human Rights

Ten years ago in plenary session the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 18 of this Declaration states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

The Baptist Public Affairs Committee took note of the tenth anniversary of this significant declaration and passed the following resolution:

"Whereas December 10, 1958 marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and

"Whereas religious liberty is a fundamental human right and is recognized and included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which makes this Declaration of major concern to Baptists all over the world; therefore as your Committee on World Issues, we recommend that:

"The Committee on Public Affairs urge its constituent conventions in the United States to communicate with their churches in affiliation with these conventions and urge upon them the importance of appropriately observing this significant anniversary on December 10, 1958 in their own churches and in cooperation with such community and interdenominational observances as might be locally arranged;

"That the Committee on Public Affairs send a copy of this recommendation to the Baptist World Alliance for such communication with Baptists in other lands as may be advisable."