

# 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

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### POSITIVE FREEDOM

In the introductory interviews with the Joint Committee representatives the writer expressed freely the conviction that freedom can neither be understood nor practiced "negatively" in our modern world. It must be a positive quality of well integrated relationships. It does not consist of political instruments which limit government, nor of gulfs between areas of operation, nor even of walls of separation, to use Supreme Court language. Freedom is an atmosphere which is the product of wholesome community among people. In a congested world like ours the absence of such community means the absence of freedom.

From the above views it follows that the different kinds of freedom are inseparable. We cannot hope to retain religious freedom while we forego intellectual or academic freedom, nor can we hope to retain any of these while we regiment the population by fear and coercion to the acceptance of some system of economic organization or political thought. Freedom must be seen as a quality of life, which expresses attitudes toward other individuals, confidence and respect in the presence of cultural, political, economic, and religious differences. With the passing months and with additional study and observation these generalizations are becoming more confirmed and more intense.

When seen from these premises our legal approaches to the preservation of freedom constitute admissions that this quality of life is or may be compromised. Our instruments of government should stand ready to hold back the forces of disorganization as a stop-gap to give the constructive spiritual forces opportunity to heal the ruptures and tensions. In the last analysis personal and group relationships are dependent on attitudes that arise out of the depths of the individual soul and the relationship of that soul to his Creator.

It should be abundantly clear to us who are of the Household of Faith that legal restraint is never the highest form of motivation in human relations. The highest good with reference to people's relations to liquor is not prohibition but an instructed, alert, devoted people who will not have the vile product. The highest good in race relations is not court decisions but love, understanding, and concern for the welfare of all our fellowmen which transcends even our own tastes and

economic interests. Similarly, the highest in patriotism is not nationalism, chauvinism, or power politics, but such a vital relationship to the King of Kings that all men who are His subjects become our compatriots. Such relationships engender an atmosphere of true freedom, for "against such there is no law."

Obviously, if these things are to be realities they must flow from the spiritual springs of our civilization. Christian living must find its meaning and significance in proper relatedness as well as in proper aloofness. Here then is the crux question in our present day confused panicky search for freedom: How can the people of God gain such devotion and maturity as to adequately meet the problems of our age?

In the attempt to produce that kind of Christians every aspect of our church program should contribute. Evangelism, instruction, fellowship, prayer, missions and all the other activities should be carried on with an awareness of people's needs and in a spirit of humble appraisal of our own performance. The church program that really produces Christians with New Testament commitment to the Lord and socio-civic effectiveness for our own day will not lack for members or recognition in the community, and on that kind of foundation freedom will become reality for people generally and not only for the fortunate few.

#### A NEGLECTED FUNCTION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

One of the intriguing aspects of Christ's life is the closeness of His associations with His followers. There resulted a similar closeness in their associations with one another. On the road, in the boat, and on the mountain there was abundant opportunity for group thinking, for mental interaction, for give-and-take in discussion. A Christian fellowship is something bigger and nobler than an aggregation of human beings, for in such fellowship vision is clarified, the soul is enlarged, conscience is cultivated, and courage for right grows. When two or three gather in His name, He is present.

This aspect of the Christian experience tends to drop out of present day life. Corporate worship does not give it, and even the prayer fellowship rarely offers it. Yet if we are to have convictions which are our own, not merely play-backs from some source, we need to compare notes with our brethren as we face up seriously to very practical questions of right and wrong in our lives and in our relationships to the community and to the world. We need the help of others' observations and knowledge. We need their ideas in order to check our own rationalizing, wishful thinking, and self-justification.

An opinion, which is held on the basis of this broader group information and analysis and sought out in the light of the Revealed Word of God, is likely to become a personal conviction with sufficient power to mold action and behavior.

Ecclesiastical churches assume that definitions of right and wrong must be handed down to the populace by authority of those who know.

Our Baptist polity looks to the individual, his local associations with believers, and to his study of the Bible for these definitions. This, of course, does not deny the importance of convention resolutions and statements which call our attention to areas of life which need study and prayerful analysis.

This denominational servant is idealistic enough to believe that if we as eighteen million twentieth century Baptists would give ourselves wholeheartedly to such yielding of hearts and minds to the light we have available in our local fellowship and then exchange conclusions between churches and regions we could gain a most remarkable consensus, a spirit of unity, and a devotion to right which would make us a power in the land. Personal devotion, adequate information, careful and prayerful group thinking are the main elements in the process by which the "Lord leads His dear children along."

#### BAPTIST VOTING POWER

We frequently remind ourselves that the six conventions connected with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs have a membership above eighteen million. Most of these are adults and are therefore potential voters. However, the number who actually vote constitutes the measure of our voting power.

The significance of voting lies not only in the effect on the election returns but also in the effect on the attitudes of the person elected. The voters are the constituency. Normally an office holder feels that he should serve first and foremost those who elected him. In other words, whenever a Baptist fails to vote he thereby plays down the national recognition of Baptist viewpoints.

We Baptists have just reason to feel politically ignored in comparison with the constant attention being paid to some other elements in our population who are no more numerous and some who are far less numerous. A large part of the explanation lies in our own civic inactivity.

With another national midterm election just a few months away it is time to ask how many Baptists will participate? You can make a good estimate for your own state on the basis of the number of Baptists in the state and the percentage of the potential voters who actually voted in the last midterm election. The data below were compiled and published by the Congressional Quarterly January 29, 1954, and are open knowledge to all on Capitol Hill.

(By "potential vote" is meant the number of citizens old enough to vote.)

<u>State</u>	<u>1950 Potential Vote</u>	<u>Percent of Voters Who Actually Voted in Election of Congressmen (House)</u>
Alabama	1,749,000	8.7
Arizona	442,000	40.2
Arkansas	1,113,000	26.6
California	7,214,000	46.6
Colorado	845,000	52.4
Connecticut	1,383,000	62.2
Delaware	211,000	61.3
Florida	1,823,000	13.9
Georgia	2,009,000	12.6
Idaho	349,000	57.3
Illinois	5,959,000	58.9
Indiana	2,557,000	62.1
Iowa	1,695,000	48.4
Kansas	1,243,000	48.8
Kentucky	1,743,000	28.0
Louisiana	1,587,000	14.3
Maine	577,000	41.2
Maryland	1,527,000	37.5
Massachusetts	3,207,000	60.7
Michigan	4,107,000	43.9
Minnesota	1,911,000	53.3
Mississippi	1,208,000	7.3
Missouri	2,643,000	47.3
Montana	372,000	56.6
Nebraska	860,000	50.7
Nevada	107,000	56.4
New Hampshire	353,000	52.5
New Jersey	3,355,000	46.8
New Mexico	375,000	46.2
New York	10,376,000	48.7
North Carolina	2,311,000	22.6
North Dakota	367,000	49.4
Ohio	5,281,000	52.4
Oklahoma	1,382,000	44.0
Oregon	1,002,000	49.8
Pennsylvania	6,999,000	50.2
Rhode Island	538,000	54.5
South Carolina	1,151,000	4.4
South Dakota	401,000	62.0
Tennessee	1,979,000	13.3
Texas	4,738,000	7.6
Utah	390,000	67.7
Vermont	238,000	37.3
Virginia	2,026,000	10.5
Washington	1,560,000	46.4
West Virginia	1,172,000	56.6
Wisconsin	2,223,000	49.9
Wyoming	179,000	52.1
TOTAL	96,833,000	41.8