



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

★ RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ★ BAPTIST PRINCIPLES
★ PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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BAPTIST CONVENTIONS AND INSTITUTIONS ARE BEING ASKED TO TAKE FRESH LOOK AT GOVERNMENT LOANS

During the debate in the Senate on Federal aid to education earlier this year an amendment was proposed to extend government loans to parochial schools on the ground that such would be "aid" to these institutions. This was a different approach to the loan principle which had been applied to college housing and similar projects. Here was an example of making loans available as a definite government aid to private, religious education. Since then it has been proposed in Congress that government loans be made available for the total building and equipment program of colleges. Heretofore such has been restricted to self-liquidating housing projects.

This new approach to the loan principle on Capitol Hill has demanded that the denominations that previously have been favorable to government loans take a new look at the subject to see if there is a violation of religious liberty and separation of church and state. The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has taken note of this problem and is calling on its constituency to follow through on such a study. The following communication was sent to Baptist Conventions, agencies and institutions and is here printed to indicate what is involved in the problem.

The Churches and Government Credit

"We recommend to the several Baptist conventions and their agencies and institutions that they explore all the implications involved in the acceptance of loans from the government."

Such is the phraseology of a motion passed by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs at its recent spring meeting. The realization of the full importance of this motion will call for a deliberate analysis of principles and policies in a number of situations.

The Search for Principle

Church-state policies in the United States during recent years have been made progressively by moving from one crisis to another, setting important precedents in each step. This has been a normal result of a national climate of crises in which the

courts can hardly be expected to hold back the national mind.

The extension of government insured loans for the erection of college dormitories and faculty housing was based on the Federal Housing Administration principle of reducing interest by reducing the risk involved. Previously applied to private housing, this principle was next applied to colleges, public and private, then to hospitals, and has been seriously considered in Congress for building classrooms and other facilities for church schools at all levels of education. In this form it is now advocated as a form of government "aid."

Many church leaders have become concerned lest churches and their institutions move by expedience into practices which compromise the free conscience of the taxpayer or the freedom of the churches.

The Search for Consistency

Some religious fellowships think of their denomination as "the Church," and accordingly include all of the institutions in that concept. As Baptists we have had a variety of emphases, and have often been unclear whether the hospitals and the schools are really "church."

When we seek to apply our insights regarding separation of church and state it becomes necessary to clarify both the meaning of "separation" and of "church," so as to decide what relationships are acceptable for which institutions. For instance, when legislation was attempted (Morse amendment) in favor of loans to elementary and secondary parochial schools several church bodies felt compelled to oppose that proposal even though they were perplexed about the precedents of their own institutions in higher education.

The difficulty of finding clear principles is further complicated by the fact that schools and hospitals in the United States may hold a different relationship to the proclamation of the gospel from what schools and hospitals do, for instance, on foreign mission fields. It might be possible for denominationally owned and operated institutions in the United States to be more directly related to American educational and welfare objectives than they are to the distinctives of Christian faith and life.

The Search for Consensus

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has neither the inclination nor the authority to make policy for any Baptist body or institution, and the Joint Committee has not issued any official position or any condemnation of institutional practices in the matter of government loans. Basic to Baptist polity is consensus. This requires deliberation, prayer, study, consultation, conference, and all the other devices which the Holy Spirit honors for the guidance of his children and his churches. This is a price we pay for our democracy, but the problems are worth the price.

In the last analysis we must find answers which to us are "Christian answers," and are not merely American legal precedent nor even social expedience. Our commitment to freedom is a matter of "right" which is rooted in God's plans and purposes. This has been the strength of our movement.

In our office is a request from one of our Baptist seminary presidents for counsel and assistance on this very question. Also there is a request from a Lutheran leader asking for materials and ideas as they move into a study of government loans. We can expect that as churches and institutions move toward clarity on this problem of conscience Baptists will seek consensus among the several fellowships, in the various states, and in the numerous different kinds of institutions.

A LOOK AT THE RELIGIOUS ISSUE IN THE CURRENT PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Someone has said that you are not really confused unless you have all the facts. This seems to be true in regard to the "religious issue" involved in a Catholic candidate for the Presidency. The more a person hears about this problem the more complex it becomes.

Another person said, "Don't tell me any more until after the election. I don't want to be confused by the facts. I would rather vote my prejudices."

Whether we like it or not religion is an issue in the current presidential campaign. Regardless of how it got there the religious issue is being discussed far and wide. In too many instances more heat than light is being generated. The nature of the problem and the gravity of the situation demands that we take a calm and objective look at what is involved.

Wide Range of Opinion

Words like "bigot" and "hypocrite" are frequently used as vague terms of abuse. The dictionary says a bigot is "one who is obstinately or intolerantly devoted to his own church, party, belief or opinion." Hypocrisy is the "act or practice of feigning to be what one is not, or to feel what one does not feel." As such these words do have meaning for both political and religious leaders.

There are those who are so blinded by their partisan interests, fears, prejudices and preconceived notions that it is impossible for them to dis-

cuss objectively proper attitudes toward a candidate of the opposite party or of another religious faith. They believe every rumor, are gullible to every anti-Catholic tale, and suffer a mental block whenever the word "Catholic" is mentioned. They refuse to take a calm and collected look at the real issues.

At the other extreme is the political opportunist who declares that a person's religion is irrelevant to his public life and who debunks all those who want to face up to the problem of a Roman Catholic office holder. At the same time he is working the religious issue for all it is worth and is figuring how and where he can get the votes of certain religious blocs.

In between are those who want the truth but are hardly able to decide which of the two extremes above to follow. There are those who want to weigh each candidate according to his own merits without regard to his religious heritage. There are those who say they place intellectual, political or administrative fitness for office above all other considerations. Others insist that they have a right to take a candidate's religion into consideration in deciding for whom they shall vote. All agree that integrity is essential for any public office holder.

Viewpoints of the Politicians

Even among the candidates for the Presidency there is a wide variety of viewpoints expressed on the religious issue, and, strange to Protestant ears, it is the Roman Catholic candidate who holds to the most acceptable position.

Adlai Stevenson, a Unitarian and a Presbyterian, flippantly remarks that it does not make any difference where a person prays and that a person's religion is "irrelevant" to public policy. The place where a person prays is not the religious issue and if a person's religion is not relevant to his public life as well as his private life his religion is not worth much. We would be the last to say that a person's religion or lack of religion is irrelevant to public policy.

Hubert Humphrey, a Congregationalist, pleads that the religious issue not be discussed because it will divide the country. This is a strange attitude for a politician to take. Any "issue" has the possibility of dividing the country if it is a real issue and if it is adequately and competently discussed. In a democracy every issue should be discussed openly and widely until the public can make an intelligent choice.

Vice President Nixon, a Quaker, has said that it is hard for him to see that religion could be an issue in a political campaign, unless a candidate has no religion. This implies denial of one of the basic principles imbedded in the American constitution that says "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." It also implies irrelevance of specific religious convictions.

John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, has been forthright in answering religious questions and in facing the religious issue. He says that there are

legitimate questions of public policy of concern to religious groups which no one should feel bigoted about raising, and which he does not object to answering. Specifically he mentioned federal assistance to parochial schools, an ambassador to the Vatican, birth control, censorship, divorce and relations with Spain.

Mr. Kennedy himself has stated the religious issue as clearly as anyone else. He says: "There is only one legitimate question underlying all the rest: Would you, as President of the United States, be responsive in any way to ecclesiastical pressures or obligations of any kind that might in any fashion influence or interfere with your conduct of that office in the national interest?" He also correctly insists that he should not be the only candidate to be asked questions about the relation of his religion to public policy. He insists that all candidates should answer such questions.

Why Is There a Religious Issue?

In view of the fact that Mr. Kennedy has repeatedly asserted his devotion to the principle of separation of church and state, his opposition to an Ambassador to the Vatican, his objection to Federal aid to parochial schools, his declaration that no one in the Roman Catholic Church speaks for him, why is the religious issue continued in connection with his candidacy for the Presidency?

There are probably three most significant answers to this question: (1) the nature of the Catholic faith; (2) certain activities on the part of Mr. Kennedy himself; and (3) the political maneuvering of all the politicians.

The Nature of the Catholic Faith

First, the Roman Catholic Church is hierarchical in structure, authoritarian in nature, and lays down rules and regulations for its people in a manner unknown to the Protestant and Jewish faiths.

The rules of the Catholic church apply to a Catholic in public life. When exceptions to the rules may be desirable, the Catholic public official must secure the permission of his Bishop before he can have ecclesiastical approval. This is hardly a position for a President of the United States to be in, especially in view of the fact that his supreme authority is the people of the nation.

According to articles in Catholic publications the one distinguishing mark of a Roman Catholic is his devotion to the Pope as Christ's representative on earth. This creates a special problem when it is understood that the Pope claims temporal as well as spiritual authority over all of his subjects.

Of course, there are rebellious subjects, subjects of the Pope who refuse to bow to his every dictate. It cannot be said that the Pope exercises control over every Roman Catholic. But it can be said that if a person is a true Catholic and if he practices his religion consistently all the way, he must be subject to the final authority of the Pope. This of course, puts an American Catholic in a

dilemma. Likewise, it puts the American voter in a dilemma.

Inconsistency Between Word and Deed

Second, a comparison of the actions and pronouncements of the Catholic candidate reveals that he is not altogether consistent. Mr. Kennedy vehemently proclaims, "I do not speak for the Catholic church on issues of public policy -- and no one in that church speaks for me." His vote against Federal aid to parochial schools and his opposition to an Ambassador to the Vatican seem to support his position.

However, he admitted before the National Press Club that the report by Dr. Daniel A. Poling of the Christian Herald was true, although he said the interpretation of the event was wrong. Kennedy had been invited in 1950 to participate in the celebration of the successful fund raising campaign for the Chapel of the Four Chaplains. He had accepted, but later due to the interference of his ecclesiastical superiors he declined on the ground that as a Catholic he could not participate.

Again, at the annual meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors he accused the press of being the active agent in the intensity of the "religious issue" in the current campaign and he debunked the idea of religious voting blocs.

Indications are that the Kennedy campaign forces are making capital of the religious issue for the benefit of their candidate, and Kennedy himself sought in 1956 to make political hay out of the fact that he is a Roman Catholic.

It is reliably reported by more than one newspaper columnist that at the 1956 Democratic Convention his staff prepared and circulated with his consent a 3,000 word memorandum which purported to show not only that there was a "Catholic vote," but where it was located, how it could be organized and why it would be decisive in winning the election for the Democratic party.

This was written under the direction of Ted Sorensen, who was and still is Senator Kennedy's chief executive officer, and circulated by his friend, John Bailey, Connecticut Democratic State Chairman. The memorandum showed how strongly the Catholic candidates had run in Catholic districts and concluded:

"The above indicates that a Catholic Vice-Presidential candidate could...begin a new era of Democratic victories....If he brought into the Democratic fold only those normally Democratic Catholics who voted for Ike (in 1952), he would probably swing New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Illinois - for 132 electoral votes.

"If he also wins the votes of Catholics who shifted to the Republicans in 1948 or earlier, he could also swing New Jersey, Minnesota, Michigan, California, Wisconsin, Ohio, Maryland, Montana and maybe even New Hampshire - for a total of 265 electoral votes (needed to win: 266). Thus Ike could and would be defeated."

It is hard to understand how a person who has attempted such use of his Catholic connections could hurl charges of bigotry, or accuse the press, or deny the existence of Catholic bloc voting, or debunk the religious issue in the campaign.

Politicians Play the Game

A third answer to the question as to why the religious issue is so intense in the current campaign is the political maneuvering of all of the politicians. While they publicly denounce the religious issue and glibly slide over the real issue involved and seek to be generous and liberal on this question, they are at the same time working day and night trying to figure how they can capture the Catholic vote and at the same time not alienate the Protestant vote, if there is such. In any event all of them count the number of votes involved on either side of the fence and they will willingly sacrifice the lesser of the two, if they think they can win the other. At the same time they play the religious issue to their advantage and to their opponent's disadvantage whenever and wherever they can.

Basic Facts To Remember

As a voter considers the implications of the religious issue in American politics there are certain basic facts that should be taken into consideration.

1. The constitutional guarantee against religious tests for public office is a valid principle and all persons should insist on its application.

2. A person's religion is relevant to many public issues and it is therefore a valid point of consideration on the part of the voters. Pertinent questions should be asked of all candidates rather than selecting only one faith to examine.

3. Political expediency may determine the course of action not only of a Catholic politician but also of a Protestant. A Catholic responsible to a Protestant balance of power may ignore the principles of his faith and follow established American public policy. Likewise a Protestant elected by a Catholic balance of power may abandon some of his traditional viewpoint in order to please his Catholic constituency.

The voter faces a difficult task in ferreting out facts from prejudices in these matters, but he has a responsibility to do so.

Fair Campaign Practices

The Fair Campaign Practices Committee has been deeply concerned for more than a year with the dangers involved in the injection of religious issues into the 1960 campaign. With the cooperation and co-sponsorship of the National Conference of Christians and Jews it recently brought together a distinguished group of religious leaders of all faiths for a two day discussion on a full, frank and friendly basis.

On the basis of this discussion the Committee feels that it can lay down some simple principles which it hopes will commend themselves to American voters.

1. It is proper and desirable that every public official should attempt to govern his conduct by a personal conscience informed by his religious faith.

2. No candidate for public office should be opposed or supported because of his particular religious affiliation. A campaign for a public office is not an opportunity to vote for one religion against another.

3. A candidate should be judged by his qualifications for the office he seeks, and by his position on issues relevant to that office. He may properly be questioned about such issues and about the bearing of his religious faith and conscience on them. A candidate's religion is relevant to a voter's decision, but only so far as it bears on such relevant political issues.

4. Stirring up, fostering, or tolerating religious animosity, or injecting elements of a candidate's faith not relevant to the duties of the office he seeks are unfair campaign practices.

5. Intelligent, honest, and temperate public discussion of the relation of religious faith to the public issues will, as it has already done, raise the whole level of the campaign.

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