

BAPTIST PRESS

A BAPTIST NEWS SERVICE

for Southern Baptists' Radio-Television Commission, Fort Worth, Annuity Board, Home Mission Board Division of Evangelism and Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas.

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SBC--ABC Merger Talks
Draw Fire, Approval

By The Baptist Press

Editorials in five Southern Baptist newspapers during January alternately approved and criticized a proposal to hold exploratory talks discussing the possibility of a merger between the long-separated Southern Baptist and American Baptist Conventions.

Three of the editors approved the suggestion---two staunchly opposed it.

The proposal was suggested editorially last month by Editor J. Marse Grant of the Biblical Recorder, state Baptist paper of North Carolina.

In response to Grant's editorial, the general secretary of the American Baptist Convention, Edwin H. Tuller, said that such meetings, "with the accent on the exploratory, are certainly in order."

Later Grant called for the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to take action on Tuller's reply and consider setting up the talks during the Committee's meeting in Nashville, Feb. 20-22.

Meanwhile, the Baptist New Mexican criticized the proposed talks, saying that "there is a strong possibility that harm would result from discussion of the merger."

Editor Horace F. Burnes of the New Mexican, said the talks would cause a "stir among the people" of both conventions. He cited differences in methods of work and American Baptist affiliation with the National Council of Churches as further reasons for opposing the talks.

Another Baptist editor, Leon Macon of the Alabama Baptist, deplored the current trend toward church union as "one of the greatest threats to the Christian movement."

"As sure as Southern Baptists unite with the American Baptists," Macon said, "there will be a loss of our missionary momentum and we will settle down to a mediocre influence in the Kingdom of God."

The editor of the Mississippi Baptist Record and a Washington, D. C. pastor of a church affiliated with both conventions had earlier endorsed a closer alliance between the two groups.

Editor Gainer Bryan of the Maryland Baptist endorsed federation, rather than union, of the two groups and suggested "closer association with other Baptist groups."

This would "run us smack into the race problem," said Bryan, "since the third and fourth ranking Baptist bodies in the country (as to size) are both Negro."

When race riots struck the University of Georgia in Athens, Ga., where two Negro students were enrolled, the Christian Index (Baptist paper) and an Athens Baptist pastor deplored the violence and urged their people to return to law and order.

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Baptist missionary work in Cuba continued in January despite the break in diplomatic relations. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board ... announced no change in the policy of asking missionaries to use their best judgement in staying or leaving strife-torn country.

Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Hurt, missionaries in Cuba since 1957, chose to leave the Island because of uncertainty of travel. They were transferred to the denomination's mission work in Panama.

In Texas, an effort to stop Catholic nuns from teaching in a Bremond public school while wearing religious garb was appealed to the State Board of Education after the state commissioner of education ruled he did not have the authority to tell the teachers what they must wear.

A Baptist deacon and member of the Texas House of Representatives introduced a bill in the state legislature to make it unlawful for public school teachers to wear religious garb in the classroom.

A police effort clamping down on Sunday closing law violations in Houston, Tex., drew editorial comment from three Baptist editors.

Editor John J. Hurt of the Christian Index suggested starting a similar movement in Georgia with religious and civic groups taking the lead.

Editors Burns and Macon of the Baptist New Mexican and the Alabama Baptist both opposed editorially Sunday closing laws in general, stating that state laws should not be established solely for the purpose of guaranteeing worship.

The Baptist New Mexican "deplored the fact that Houston ministerial groups asked for boycotts against businesses which remain open on Sundays." Both papers, however, added that for reasons of health, one day of rest should be set aside, not by law, but by the businesses themselves.

On two different occasions during January, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Ramsey Pollard of Memphis, Tenn., declared that the denomination is not, and has not been, in a spiritual recession.

Pollard made the statement at a meeting of the Southern Baptist Public Relations Association in Memphis and at the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference in Fort Worth.

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Bill Introduced To Ban
Teaching In Nun's Garb

(2-2-61)

AUSTIN, Tex.--(BP)--A bill that would forbid public school teachers from wearing religious garb in the classroom has been introduced in the Texas legislature.

Rep. Leon Thurman, a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Anson, Tex., is sponsoring the measure.

The Thurman Bill states: "No teacher in the public schools of this state shall teach any class in such public schools while dressed in any religious garb or while wearing any visible religious insignia."

Penalty for violation of the bill would be the loss of state school funds.

The bill was prompted, said Rep. Thurman, by a recent ruling by Texas Commission of Education J. W. Edgar in the controversial Bremond school case.

Complainants in the Bremond case charge that Catholic nuns teaching in a Bremond, Tex., public school while wearing religious garb is a violation of separation of church-state clauses in both Texas and U. S. Constitutions.

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Edgar ruled recently that he had no authority to forbid teachers from wearing religious robes. "This is a question for the courts or the legislature to decide," he said.

Complainants have appealed Edgar's ruling to the State Board of Education, saying that the board has the authority to issue an immediate order to halt the Catholic nuns from teaching while wearing religious garb and to stop the Bremond School Board from leasing the school building, located within the compound of other church property, from St. Mary's Catholic Church for a "token" \$1 per year.

The Thurman Bill came as a complete surprise to the complainants in the Bremond case, said Jimmy Allen, secretary of the Citizen's Association for Free Public Schools, the plaintiffs in the case.

"The Citizen's Association will probably be very happy with the Thurman Bill for it could solve our whole problem," Allen said. He added that the group would probably discuss the bill and its possible affect on the Bremond case at a planned special meeting.

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Houston Files 29 Charges
For Violating Blue Laws

(2-2-61)

HOUSTON--(BP)--Twenty-nine charges have been filed against two Houston firms and their employees for operating their businesses on Sunday.

Six of the men charged were found guilty of the charges by Houston courts and fined \$20 each and court costs. All six men have indicated they would appeal the decisions to a higher court.

For four consecutive Sundays in January, a special Houston police squad clamped down on violators of the controversial Sunday closing laws.

Although many businesses were apparently open for trade on Sunday, the lawmen confined their arrests to employees of two firms---Mike Persia Chevrolet which has openly advertised that it is open for business 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; and White Electric and Lumber Co.

N. Elmer White, 31, owner of the builders' supply company and head of a citizens committee for Sunday freedom, has been charged on three successive Sundays for violating the "blue laws."

White, a Seventh Day Adventist who says he is not presently a member of any Houston church, told the Baptist Press that he felt that the Sunday closing laws violated constitutional rights of separation of church and state.

"Religion is not the main issue at all," White said. "But the laws do violate some people's religion as well as their freedom---and that includes people who don't have any religion." He said that the real issue is that a majority is forcing its views upon the minority, "and that's pretty discriminating."

Mayor Lewis Cutrer, who ordered the crackdown on the closing law violations, said that he was not favoring one group over another. "I maintain that no one has the legal right to violate the law," he said.

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Folks and facts.....

(2-2-61)

....Edwin McNeely, professor of church music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, will retire from his position after 30 years at the world's largest theological seminary in Fort Worth. He will become minister of music at the First Baptist Church of Sulphur, La.; and Mrs. McNeely, who has served as supplementary church music teacher at the seminary for the last four years, will direct the church's children's choirs. (BP)

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Amendment Proposed
To Allow Race Betting

AUSTIN, Tex.--(BP)--An amendment to the Texas Constitution has been proposed to allow parimatuel betting on horse racing in nine of the largest counties in the state.

Rep. V. E. Berry of San Antonio, Tex., who has identified himself as "a retired gambler," introduced the bill in the state legislature.

It would provide for a local option election to be called in each of the nine counties on petition of five per cent of the voters in the last general election.

In order to pass, the bill would have to be approved by both the state House and Senate, and then receive a majority vote in the November, 1962 general election.

If the measure passes all three stumbling blocks and then is approved in the local option election, all racing would be supervised by a Texas horse racing board of five members appointed by the governor.

Berry suggested that the state could reap heavy taxes from parimutuel betting which might help solve a tremendous deficit in the state treasury.

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Baptist Group Raps
Kennedy On Liquor

(2-2-61)

LA MARQUE, Tex.--(BP)--A resolution adopted by District 4 of the Baptist General Convention of Texas here has reprimanded President John F. Kennedy for serving liquor at the White House.

The resolution was approved unanimously by 500 Baptists representing 396 churches and 51 missions in 19 south Texas counties.

The resolution said: "Since it has been publicized in the press, on radio and television that hard liquor has been served in the White House, we express our opposition to such practice."

It advised President Kennedy to read Proverbs 20:1, which states "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is riotous; and whosoever relieth thereby is not wise."

The resolution did not mention any specific instance citing liquor being served at the White House, but the Associated Press reported that liquor was served at a recent Kennedy reception for appointees of the new administration.

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Evangelism Microfilms
Proposed For Seminary

(2-2-61)

FORT WORTH--(RP)--A microfilm research center on evangelism may soon be established at the Fleming Library of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, here.

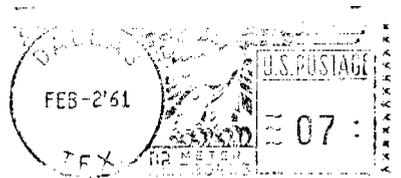
The research center will feature "all available research materials concerning the Billy Graham evangelistic movement so that students can study them in years to come," said Robert C. Ferm, director of research for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Immediate plans are to microfilm all news clippings, magazine articles, and other available information concerning Graham and evangelism. The films will be made in Minneapolis and forwarded to the seminary.

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