

# BAPTIST FEATURES

PRODUCED BY BAPTIST PRESS

A BAPTIST NEWS SERVICE

Special reports on Baptist programs,  
activities, trends, and newsmakers.

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE  
W. BARRY GARRETT, REGIONAL EDITOR  
1628—16th St., N. W., Washington, 9, D. C.  
Telephone: ADams 2-1760

March 20, 1961

Church-State Crisis  
Hovers Over Nation

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--- That hectic week in Washington, the Ides of March, 1961, will go down in legislative history as one of the most significant in church-state discussions.

Just what happened? Of course, it will take a careful historical research job long after these events to gather the facts and evaluate them. But to this on-the-scene observer it looked like this.

The basic question: Shall the Government provide financial aid for private and parochial schools?

This question took on several aspects. It varied from opinions that outright grants should be made to parochial schools, to proposals for long-term, low-interest loans, to income tax deductions or exemptions or credits for parents whose children attend parochial schools, to suggestions that the Government make a cash contribution to each parent for each school age child for the parent to cash at any school he chose, to a reversion to the pure position that no Government aid should go to any church or church institution for any purpose.

President Kennedy had proposed Federal school aid measures that included only public schools on the elementary and secondary levels, but which would take in both public and private colleges. His campaign pledge was "no unconstitutional aid to parochial schools." His determination to keep his word ran headlong into the efforts of the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church to secure public support for their schools.

The Roman Catholic bishops announced that if their schools did not get a piece of the public pie, they would fight to keep everybody else from getting any pie. They overstepped themselves on this one and members of Congress as well as Protestants and many other groups chided the bishops for playing such a childish game. The White House fumed and became adamant in its determination not to be pushed around by the hierarchy.

In efforts to salvage his education bills the President first proposed that loans to parochial schools be separated from a general aid to education bill. He even declared that in his opinion across the board loans to parochial schools would be unconstitutional.

Next the President appealed to the church leaders not to divide the Nation over the issue of governmental aid to parochial schools, an appeal that clearly was made to the bishops of his own church. He then expressed bewilderment that such an issue would be brought to a climax while he as the first Catholic was President. He pointed out that educational proposals had been before Congress previously, but trouble over parochial schools had not risen as now.

Committee hearings were conducted in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Everybody wanted to get in on the show. Congressmen, Governors of States, educational organizations, labor, farmers organizations, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Unitarians, Humanists, everybody clamored for a place on the witness stand.

-more-

Committee chairmen were torn between the desire to let every voice and opinion be fully recorded and the determination to get on with legislative business with a minimum of religious controversy. While the Senate committee was telling all parties to come on, the House committee was attempting to clamp down on the witnesses and to allow only two spokesmen on each side to be heard.

Yielding to the pressures of clamoring groups the House committee finally threw open the doors, lengthened the hearings and scheduled everybody who thought he might have some contribution to make.

In contrast to previous policies on the part of Congressmen and Senators, most of those who testified went at lengths to explain their exact position on the matter of separation of church and state and their favor or opposition to governmental aid to religion. Religious affiliations of the Congressmen meant little in the struggle. In most every case their position reflected what they thought would be the prevailing opinion of their home district or State.

Newspaper, radio and television newscasters sought to outdo themselves in making sensational reports on the controversy. Witnesses who had substantive testimony on behalf of the public schools attracted least attention, but spokesmen who enunciated the Roman Catholic position were put in the limelight, and the advocates of public schools often were made to appear as mere objectors.

Legislative jockeying was apparent almost from hour to hour. Legislators would announce that they were opposed to governmental aid to parochial schools and a few hours later (presumably after some strategic conferences) their position would be reversed. Some said they would not introduce the Morse amendment for loans for parochial schools. Then they said they would. Then they said they wouldn't.

The Catholics wanted public school aid and parochial school loans to be included in the same bill. Conservative Democrats and Republicans heartily refrained from objecting to this proposal because they knew this would kill the whole Federal aid to education proposal. The liberals of both parties wanted the two questions separated so some kind of aid bill could be passed. Others wanted separate bills so each issue would stand on its own merits.

Arguments against parochial school aid at first centered around the question of the constitutionality of such a measure, until the constitutional lawyers sharply divided on the issue and grave doubts arose about what the Supreme Court might rule. The groups shifted to the wisdom or lack of wisdom of such proposals. Public policy then became the center of the debate.

Champions of parochial school aid said it would be in the best interest of the public. Opponents saw in this procedure the destruction of the public school system and the decline of the American democratic way of life.

Hard pressed legislators frequently turned on the opponents of the Catholic proposals and brought out vast amounts of evidence that the colleges and hospitals of many religious groups had been happy to receive Government help in the form of grants, housing loans, surplus property, G.I. educational benefits, loans and even scholarships under the National Defense Educational Act of 1958, and other helps. Why, then, they demanded to know, do you object so vigorously when a proposal is made to extend such aids to parochial schools?

This question the Congress has a right to have answered. Does it mean confession on the part of transgressors? Does it mean a change in the philosophy of church-state relations? Does it mean a sell-out of principle to expediency? Does it mean a back-up and a new start both on the part of Government and on the part of the churches and their institutions? Has the issue become so clouded that no answers can be found and that the Nation has no choice but to stumble on into worsening church-state relations?

Who will prevail? Will the Government come to dominate the churches? Will the powers of church institutions come to dominate both the Government and the churches? Will church and state remain separate and friendly, or separate and hostile, or will there be a fusing of the two and a relapse into medieval history?

-30-

Baptist Minister Named  
Peace Corps Associate

(3-20-61)

WASHINGTON (BP)--- A Baptist minister has been named an associate director for public affairs and secretary of the National Peace Corps Advisory Council, according to announcement by the White House.

William D. Moyers, former special assistant for Sen. L. B. Johnson and executive assistant for Johnson for Vice President during the 1960 election, has more recently been serving as a liaison officer between the office of the Vice President and the White House.

Moyers is a graduate of and a former public relations director for the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Tex. He is an ordained Baptist minister.

As an associate in the Peace Corps Moyers will work closely with the director, R. Sargent Shriver, in all matters pertaining to public policies, public groups, and congressional relations. In addition, he will be working with college student groups and other youth organizations.

-30-