

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE  
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Colombian Aid Program  
Faces Freedom Problem

WASHINGTON (BP)-- United States aid to Colombian education is filled with church-state problems. But in an opinion based on a careful study of the agreement itself and the pertinent correspondence, C. Emanuel Carlson, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, says the situation has some encouraging aspects.

Carlson was directed by the committee to find out the facts about the new education aid program and to give publicity to them. His findings and interpretations were released in a 12-page "staff report" to the Baptist denominations that maintain the "joint" committee.

Fear has been expressed, both in Colombia and in the United States, that American tax dollars were to be used to build up the power of the Roman Catholic schools. The educational system in Colombia is under the control of the Roman Catholic Church, according to a Vatican Concordat. This has resulted in serious discrimination against Protestant pupils.

Carlson's findings as revealed by the government documents, by talks with high government officials, and by information from Colombia sustain a number of previously published accounts. But several inaccurate reports were also uncovered.

The agreement between the United States and Colombia was not a "treaty" as reported from other sources. It is a "Project Agreement between the Agency for International Development (AID), an agency of the Government of the United States of America, and the Ministry of Education, an agency of the Government of Colombia."

According to the agreement an initial four-year program will provide about \$40 million from the United States to match approximately the same amount from Colombia to develop the public school system there. This will build 22,000 classrooms and four normal schools. A training program for 9,500 teachers, 2,500 school administrators and 400 superintendents is included.

This is not an entirely new program, Carlson said, but it is an extension of a project begun in 1958. The "Education Servicio" has been a part of the U. S. Operations Mission in Colombia for aiding elementary education.

The agreement for the new program was signed December 12, 1961, and negotiations for its implementation have been in progress since.

Following contacts by Protestants in Colombia, U. S. Ambassador Fulton Freeman made inquiries on January 17, 1962 about school plans in "mission territories" (where the schools are exclusively Roman Catholic) and about Protestant rights in the normal schools. The reply came in a letter on March 30, 1962 from Jaime Posada, Colombian minister of education.

It has been reported by other sources that these are only "verbal assurances," but Carlson's information is that "the later commitments in the correspondence...bind the same parties as those making the original agreement."

Posada cited the Colombian Constitution, which has the wide approval of Colombian Protestants, and which guarantees extensive religious liberty to all persons and cults. He accepted responsibility for the government to see to it that the Constitution is observed in the new educational development involving U. S. funds.

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No schools will be built by U. S. aid in "mission territories." Likewise, non-Catholics may attend the new schools, and they are assured freedom from molestation and from religious coercion.

Even though these findings are encouraging, Carlson pointed out that serious religious liberty problems remain. It may be difficult to enforce on the local level the freedom ordered by the central government.

"At this distance," he said, "it would appear that the Colombian government now finds itself with conflicting international agreements (i.e., concordat with the Vatican and agreement with the United States). Which direction will the government go?"

Carlson agreed that Protestant apprehension in Colombia is well-founded because of their sufferings the past 15 years. But he speculated, "It is possible that the situation has now developed in which the government of Colombia might decide to revise the Church's dominance of public education."

He pointed out the vicious circle in which Colombia finds herself: ignorance that causes church domination, and church domination that generates ignorance. "How can it be broken?" he asked.

Since "the whole idea of the Alliance for Progress is based on the need for reform," Carlson expressed the hope that educational reform and not only expansion might be one of the major objectives of the program.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Supplementary information on Colombian school aid may be found in the May issue of the Report From The Capital which will be out the last of this week. Also the complete "staff report" will be mailed to you as soon as the mimeographing is completed.---Barry Garrett

Newspaper Questions  
School Prayer Policy

(4-30-62)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer in the public schools here has been challenged by a Washington newspaper.

In an editorial, the Washington Post questioned the Bible reading and daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer required in the Washington area public schools. This practice, the paper said, raises constitutional, policy and religious questions.

Earlier this year the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington asked school boards to prohibit religious observances in public schools. The request included the District of Columbia and six suburban areas in Virginia and Maryland.

The Washington Post editorial, referring to the defense of the practice by the school superintendent, Carl Hansen, proposed to leave the constitutional question in the hands of the Supreme Court which already has such a case under consideration.

In matters of policy, the editorial questioned the wisdom of requiring in public schools "the regular recitation of a prayer in which some of the pupils in the schools cannot conscientiously participate." Though the majority of the community may like the recitation of the prayer, it continued, a minority of the community is opposed to this observance. It pointed out that in the Nation's Capital there are children of atheists and of parents of various non-Christian religions who cannot take part in a prayer of Christian origin.

The religious question, the paper said, is whether or not the repetition of a fixed, formal prayer actually contributes to the spiritual and moral development of the young people. The prayer is recited, as a rule, it stated, "perfunctorily, often with boredom and sometimes with contempt."

"Rote is not religion," the editorial said, and "in the true sense of the term, this required recitation is sacrilegious."

It pointed out that churches and synagogues abound in the city where the children may pray, and the American family is free to worship in whatever form it prefers, "but the public schools were built for a purpose essentially different."

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Church Schools Qualify  
For Educational TV Aid

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Church colleges and other private agencies will be eligible for participation in the federal program of aid to educational television, according to a bill cleared for the President.

The Senate and the House agreed on a conference report on their bills to establish a program of educational television for the nation. The final version, as sent to the President, would include church-related institutions and non-profit organizations engaging in educational television.

The original Senate bill called for \$51 million for a five-year program of grants to the states. The House version provided for a four-year program of matching grants totaling approximately \$25 million. The conference report agreed upon by both Houses authorized \$32 million over a five-year period for federal matching grants.

The bill would permit grants to tax-supported educational agencies or to nonprofit agencies "organized primarily to engage in or encourage educational television" and meeting the Federal Communications Commission regulations.

Federal Communications Commission regulations limit eligible organizations to: (1) public or private accredited educational institutions or organizations; (2) governmental subdivisions with no independent educational organization; (3) tax-supported cultural organizations such as libraries; and (4) associations of non-profit community organizations chartered by a state to engage in noncommercial educational broadcasting.

This provision by the conference committee modifies a House amendment denying grants to educational facilities owned or operated by any nonprofit organization other than one composed exclusively of public school and state-supported college officials or state educational television agencies.

The program of educational television will be administered by the Secretary of the Health, Education and Welfare department. The conference report said the program should be given "proper priority" and should not be "subordinated to or tied in with other federal programs in the field of education."

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