

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

July 20, 1962

Dare To Be A Baptist

By C. Emanuel Carlson*

In recent days scores of Senators and Congressmen have made proposals for tampering in one way or another with the first amendment to the Constitution. All this uncertainty about our American free society has come about because the Supreme Court handed down a ruling which said that state boards of education violate the Constitution if they try to write prayers for the pupils and impose or promote them by public authority.

The American Constitution has served the nation well, and probably no item in it has done more to make the United States the world's leading free nation than the first amendment. This is the basic, abiding public policy which has prevented politicians and churchmen from utilizing the powers of government for the regimentation of the souls of the American people. This freedom is vastly more important than the freedom to spend all our money as we may please. Give to Caesar the coin that bears his image, but give to God the soul that bears God's image, was the force of Christ's statement on this comparison

Freedom or Regimentation

Why have our leaders begun to want to tamper with our basic freedom? What has gone wrong? Why are the hearts of men failing in their freedom under God and therefore seeking the intervention of government agencies in the prayer lives of the people?

The human mind is always complex. Yet a number of maladies can be identified, maladies for which remedies can be arranged. The cause of freedom is not defeated. Our time is a time for alertness and action, not for panic or alarmism.

The confusions, however, are of such magnitude that many organizations and movements that do favor freedom are now seeking words for doubletalk. Civil liberties organizations, religious denominations, interdenominational agencies, economic associations, et al., that one would expect to speak out for the spiritual freedom of men under God, are silenced or hampered by the diversities of their members' interests. Perhaps it is "for such a time as this" that the Baptist movement has been given its remarkable growth and strength?

Distortion of the Issue

Misinformation is probably one of the major reasons for the current proposals. The Supreme Court's decision has been badly reported in many areas, and some politicians apparently have adjusted themselves to the misinformation rather than assume responsibility to correct the reports.

At this point Baptists who have taken time to be well informed should be able to give much help. Visits with the editors of local papers, letters to the editor's "mail bag," conversations at work, sermons in churches, discussions at ministers' meetings, adoption and release of statements in churches, associations, state conventions, and national boards--all of these and many more will help get the truth to people. A respect for honest truth is a Christian witness and a service to our fellowmen.

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*News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention. W. C. Fields, director; Theo Sommerkamp, assistant director; 127 Ninth Ave. No., Nashville 3, Tenn.

Answer to Communism

Concern about communism is probably also contributing to the present confusion. Some seem to think of "prayer" as a kind of vehicle or tool by means of which to transmit our heritage and our moral values. This is only true if prayer is sincere and voluntary and if our ways are upright before God. "Required prayers" produce revolt rather than appreciation. Those countries which now have strong communist movements have in the past had much regimentation in prayer. Anti-clericalism, church disinterest, and even atheism develop in situations where religion seeks to perpetuate itself by coercion.

In this matter Baptists should also be able to serve this generation well. A sermon on the nature of prayer, another on the nature of worship, would be helpful in every church. Other messages could search the scriptures to discern how God chooses to deal with people. The use of government powers for gaining responses to the love of God will be scarce, and the Master's deliberate rejection of such tools for his Kingdom can be meaningful for all. The issue before us goes to the very basis of the kind of response that God desires of sinful men, and merits thoughtful, soul searching meditation of the Bible in all branches of a church's program. Check your facts and interpretations; double-check your motivations. Then send a copy of your sermon to your Congressman.

A Positive Witness Now

Popular information and spiritual insight, however, must find civic expression. Most Congressmen and Senators know the facts, and see at least some of the values. However, they are "representatives" in a nation that has "representative" government. Let us give them the chance to represent us by knowing how we think and feel about the first amendment. That amendment protects us against laws with reference to establishment of religion, and it also guards our free exercise of religion. Your Congressman would be glad to know two things in this matter: first, that you hope they will not tamper with the first amendment to the Constitution, and second, that you are strongly averse to all attempts to coerce or regiment people into prayer.

We have a stewardship unto God of our influence in this generation. This stewardship must take priority over our political party interests, over our different economic and regional interests, and over the fears and fads that are our distinctive climate. Freedom is best guarded at its deepest level. Baptists can be of help, in the name of Christ.

*C. Emanuel Carlson is executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Washington, D. C.

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Negro Baptist Speaks To National Press Club

WASHINGTON (BP)-- The first American Negro ever to speak to the National Press Club was a Baptist minister from Atlanta, Ga.

Martin Luther King, Jr., assistant pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, and president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, expounded his principles of racial equality and took a solid position for religious liberty.

In response to a question on the recent Supreme Court decision outlawing "official" governmental prayers in public schools the Negro leader expressed unhesitating approval of the Court action.

He said that the Court's decision was "sound and good, reaffirming something basic in the Nation's life, the separation of church and state." He observed that most of the criticism of the Court's action was on issues not related to the decision.

One week before his appearance at the Press Club King said that he had been convicted in the City Court of Albany, Ga., for participating in a peaceful march protesting segregated conditions in that community. Refusing to pay his fine on the basis of conscience, the Baptist minister decided to serve a jail sentence of 45 days. An unknown donor paid his fine and he was released.

This was "a new landmark in race relations" he asserted. "We have witnessed persons being ejected from lunch counters during sit-ins, and thrown into jails during the freedom rides. But for the first time, we witnessed persons being kicked out of jail."

The Negro integration leader quoted Victor Hugo as saying that there is nothing more powerful in all the world than an idea whose time had come. "Anyone sensible to the present moods, morals and trends in our nation," he declared, "must know that the time for racial justice has come."

King listed four forces that are destined to bring racial equality to the Nation. They are: (1) the industrialization of the South, (2) federal action, (3) the voice of the Church, and (4) the new determination of the Negro himself.

A disciple of Mahatma Ghandi's principles of "nonviolent resistance" King explained how the plan works. "The method of nonviolent resistance is effective in that it has a way of disarming the opponent, it exposes his moral defenses, it weakens his morale and at the same time it works on his conscience."

"It also makes it possible for the individual to struggle to secure moral ends through moral ends," he added.

King made it clear that he does not view the race problem as merely a "Southern" problem. He said that segregation "exists in the North in hidden and subtle forms. Housing and employment discrimination are often as prominent in the North as they are in the South. In short, the racial issue that we confront in America is not a sectional but a national problem."

The Negro spokesman predicted ultimate victory and racial equality in America. "When it is realized, the jangling discords of our nation will be transformed into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood, and men everywhere will know that America is truly the land of the free and the home of the brave," he said.

Senate Hearings Set
On Prayer Amendment

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Sen. James O. Eastland (D., Miss.), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, set July 26 for hearings to ask for a Constitutional amendment to reverse the recent Supreme Court decision on legislated school prayers.

Since the Supreme Court outlawed "official" governmental prayers in New York public schools a total of 49 bills and resolutions of various sorts have been introduced in both Houses of Congress. The resolutions purport to "over-rule" the decision of the Court.

The majority of the proposals call for a Constitutional amendment to provide for something that the Supreme Court has never ruled unconstitutional. The decision in the New York case was that prayer "composed by governmental officials as a part of a governmental program to further religious beliefs" is unconstitutional.

The hearing held by Sen. Eastland did not follow normal procedures of Senate committees. Ordinarily a sub-committee would have been responsible for such a hearing. Then it would make its recommendations to the whole committee.

In this case, Sen. Estes Kefauver (D., Tenn.) would have been the sub-committee chairman. He is known not to be in favor of a Constitutional amendment to provide for "official" prayers in public schools.

The House Committee on the Judiciary is headed by Rep. Emanuel Celler (D., N. Y.). He is opposed to a change in the Constitution to alter the meaning of the First Amendment. He has made it known that he has no intention of calling for a hearing by his committee. However, if enough of the House Committee members agree, they could over-rule the chairman.

In the Senate the resolutions follow the general pattern of the one offered by Sen. A. Willis Robertson (D., Va.). It reads: "No provision in this Constitution or any article of amendment thereto shall be construed to prohibit nondenominational religious observance through the invocation of the blessing of God or the recitation of prayer, as a part of the activities of any school or other educational institution supported in whole or in part from public revenues, if participation therein is not made compulsory."

The Eastland resolution adds Bible reading to the prayer provision of the others. Also he includes a second section that reads: "The right of each State to decide on the basis of its own public policy questions of decency and morality, and to enact legislation with respect thereto, shall not be abridged."

Many Washington observers are pointing out that much of the objection in Congress to the Supreme Court decision is not related to the point of the New York prayer case. The objection is rather to the practice of the Court, upon the authority of the Fourteenth amendment, in applying the provisions of the First Amendment to each of the States instead of confining it to the Federal government.

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EDITORS: Please note the date in the lead sentence. If this story is used after July 26 change the lead to read: "Sen. James O. Eastland (D., Miss.), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, held hearings to ask," etc.

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WASHINGTON 9, D. C.



**THEO SOMMERRAMP
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
127 NINTH AVENUE, NORTH
NASHVILLE, TENN**

THE WASHINGTON OFFICE OF THE BAPTIST PRESS

WATCH FOR THE (BP) CREDIT LINE

Baptist Press

July 20, 1962

cutline #1

STUDY GROUP--The 1962 Southern Baptist Convention appointed a special Committee to Study Baptist Faith and Message. Pictured here are members of the committee gathered in Nashville for their first session. It is the first time the president of the SBC and the presidents of Baptist state conventions have been called together in an official capacity, H. H. Hobbs, SBC president and committee chairman, reported. (BP) Photo by Jud Wood.

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cutline #2

COLORADO EDITOR--O. L. Bayless of Denver, secretary of evangelism for the Colorado Baptist General Convention, has assumed also duties as editor of the convention's semimonthly newspaper, the Rocky Mountain Baptist. (BP) Photo.

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