

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE
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Baptists Ask Changes
In Food Distribution

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (BP)-- The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in semi-annual session here registered its dissatisfaction with the church-state relationships involved in the distribution of American surplus food overseas.

C. Emanuel Carlson is executive director of the Baptist Committee, which has its headquarters in Washington, D. C.

The occasion of the Committee's views is the proposed extension of Public Law 480 for five years. P.L. 480 provides for agricultural surpluses to be given free to voluntary agencies for distribution abroad. It also provides the cost of transportation of such products.

A proposed amendment would make it possible for the government to buy foreign currency and give it to the voluntary agency for distribution costs after the food arrives overseas.

Many of the voluntary agencies involved are church-related. The five largest distributors are: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Catholic Relief Services, Church World Service, CARE, and Lutheran World Relief.

The stated purpose of P.L. 480 is "...to promote the economic stability of American agriculture and the national welfare" and the "furtherance of the foreign policy of the United States."

In view of the fact that many of the commodities are distributed by church agencies the Baptist Committee urged a restatement of the purpose of the act to emphasize "the meeting of human need rather than the purposes of state policy."

The Baptists also expressed the hope that the government would build up "channels of distribution which relieve the churches of the danger of distortions of their mission or the use of inappropriate influence."

The reason for this was that the use of church channels for distributing government foods tends to identify the church agency with American foreign policy rather than to emphasize its humanitarian and evangelistic motives.

The hope was expressed that such non-church agencies as the Red Cross, the Peace Corps, and others might be increasingly used by the government for its channels of distribution.

Hearings on P.L. 480 have already been held by the House Committee on Agriculture Operations of the House Agriculture Committee. No hearings have been held in the Senate. The bill is still in the process of formulation.

At the hearings only the Lutheran World Relief representative raised questions about the propriety of church organizations being used as government agencies. Although the Lutherans argued against the practice, they spoke mainly against enlarging the operation rather than asking for its discontinuance.

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According to testimony by Paul C. Empie, executive director of the National Lutheran Council, five agencies shipped 98.15 per cent of government surplus foods received by all voluntary agencies in 1962. The breakdown is as follows:

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, .79 per cent; Catholic Relief Services, 58.4 per cent; Church World Service, 12.91 per cent; CARE, 23.69 per cent; and Lutheran World Relief, 2.36 per cent.

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Baptist Newsman Will
Report Vatican Council

(3-9-64)

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (BP)-- A Baptist newsman will report on the third session of the Vatican Council II, which meets in Rome Sept. 14 to Nov. 20.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs voted to send its associate director, W. Barry Garrett, back to Rome to cover the Council's session this year. The Committee, which was in semi-annual session here, has its headquarters in Washington, D. C.

Garrett reported on the second session last year. His 14 reports from Rome were sent to Baptist publications in the United States. European Baptist Press sent several of his stories to publications throughout the Continent.

An accredited news correspondent in the Senate and House press galleries and the White House in the Nation's Capital, Garrett is also the Washington regional editor for Baptist Press, news agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. He also operates a separate news service from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs for publications of other Baptist conventions throughout North America.

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Baptist Committee Hits
Religion Amendments

(3-9-64)

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (BP)-- The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in semi-annual session here reaffirmed "its conviction that laws and regulations prescribing prayers or devotional exercises do not contribute to a free exercise of religion."

The action of the Baptist Committee was taken in view of "a trend in many parts of our land to assume that prayer and devotional experiences of children are and should be subject to legislation by boards of education." Members of Congress are feeling a rising pressure to amend the Constitution to permit such regulations by boards of education of by state legislatures.

The Committee opposed such proposed constitutional changes. It also hit appeals by political leaders "for the establishment of religious acts through legalized means to arouse public sentiment." The Committee said, "This we regard to be in bad taste as a violation of the principle of separation of church and state."

In its statement the Committee appealed "to Baptists everywhere" to inform themselves about principles of freedom and to insist to their legislative and political leaders that the role of the churches and of state agencies should be kept separate.

While the Committee contended that it is not the role of public schools to conduct devotional exercises, it said that "it is the business of the public schools...to transmit the cultural legacy of our land." "This requires," it continued, "the objective recognition of religion as part of the experiences of the people and as one force operating in our society." But a tax-supported agency attended under compulsory school laws should not be an instrument to advance commitments to God, it said.

Since the Supreme Court's decisions on prayer and Bible reading in the public schools 110 members of Congress have introduced 132 measures proposing constitutional amendments on religion in public schools. Hearings have not been scheduled yet, but indications are that they will be held some time this year.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs is maintained by eight national Baptist bodies in the United States and Canada. C. Emanuel Carlson is the executive director. The Committee's office is in Washington, D. C.

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The text of the statement by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs is as follows:

LEGISLATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL RELIGION

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has taken note of a trend in many parts of our land to assume that the prayer and devotional experiences of children are and should be subject to legislation by boards of education. Accordingly, many are urging that the Constitution of the United States should be amended so as to permit such regulations by boards of education or by state legislatures.

1. The Baptist Joint Committee reaffirms its conviction that laws and regulations prescribing prayers or devotional exercises do not contribute to a free exercise of religion and should not be encouraged.

2. The Baptist Joint Committee also expresses a deep concern lest such laws and regulations become the means for confusing the moral values of American society for a devotion to religious insights. While the Committee is enthusiastic about much in the American heritage as a national way of life, the equation of religious ideas and practices with our national culture will erode rather than strengthen the American heritage.

3. The Committee holds that it is the business of the public schools, operated under law, supported by taxation, and attended by pupils under compulsory school attendance laws, to transmit the cultural legacy of our land. This requires the objective recognition of religion as part of the experiences of the people and as one force operating in our society. These premises, however, do not constitute religion and should not be advanced as the ultimate commitments for which people exist.

4. The Committee recognizes that some political leaders may make appeals for the establishment of religious acts through legalized means to arouse public sentiment. This we regard to be in bad taste as a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. This is the basic principle of the Constitution of the United States that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

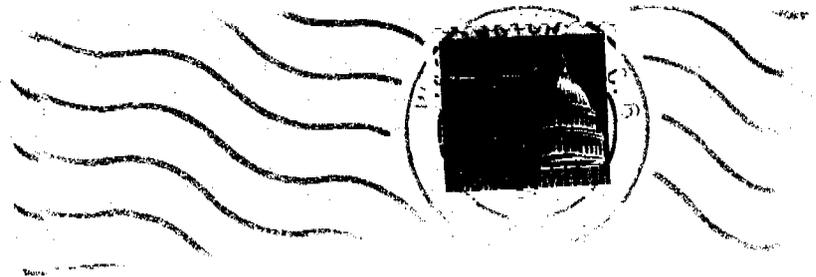
5. Conversely, the Committee appeals to Baptists everywhere to inform themselves carefully regarding the fundamental principles of freedom and to participate as informed citizens in the creation of a social order in which people of all religions or of no religion have the equitable civic treatment which they merit as people. Legislative representatives and political leaders should be made aware of our Baptist support for a clear distinction between the roles of the churches and those of state agencies.

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