

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE
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Baptist Editors Plead
For First Amendment

by Nona Saturday
Baptist Press Staff Writer

"Leave the First Amendment alone!" is generally the opinion expressed by Baptist editors on the proposed constitutional amendments relating to prayer and Bible reading in the public schools.

Ten state Baptist papers recently gave editorial support to the First Amendment and the Supreme Court decisions outlawing required Bible reading and prayer in public schools. They opposed the so-called "Becker amendment" and other proposals to amend the First Amendment.

Hearings on the proposed constitutional amendments are currently in process before the House Judiciary Committee.

The editorials argued that support of such proposals, though well meaning, stems from a misunderstanding of the Court decisions and of the proposed amendments.

The Florida Baptist Witness, W. G. Stracener, editor, said the First Amendment "has served well to make possible a free church in a free state...It has guaranteed the exercise of the kind of religious freedom from which all other freedoms must rise and by which they must also continue to be nurtured."

John J. Hurt, in The Christian Index, said attempts to alter the First Amendment represent judgment giving way to emotions. He said it is necessary to understand that "the Supreme Court did not order God out of the school room. It said only that the law cannot demand an invitation for Him to enter."

Editor E. S. James of Texas said, "The Baptist Standard holds that the present effort in Congress to amend the First Amendment to the national Constitution poses an unparalleled threat to religious freedom."

The editors stressed the fact that the Supreme Court decisions did not outlaw prayer and Bible reading except when officially required or sanctioned by government at any level--local, state or federal.

"The rulings are not a restraint against the people but against the state," said Gainer E. Bryan in The Maryland Baptist.

J. Marse Grant, writing in the Biblical Recorder, said the key words in the controversy are "permit" and "allow." The North Carolina editor said the Supreme Court did not rule against "permitting" or "allowing" children to read the Bible or to pray, but it "did refuse to 'permit' or 'allow' school boards or state legislatures to regulate such praying and Bible reading."

The editors agreed that the proposed constitutional amendments would have the effect of destroying the religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment.

In the Alabama Baptist, Leon Macon called the "organized effort to make it legal for required and compulsory Bible reading and prayers in our public schools...dangerous." "We do not believe any of us want our children forced to practice

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any kind of religious exercise," he stated.

"A program of required Bible reading and prayer in the public schools cannot produce anything more than an innocuous religion of religion itself," said J. Terry Young in the California Southern Baptist.

"If Christianity has become so weak that it must depend upon government-required Bible reading and officially composed prayer for its existence, Christianity has then already become a dead religion...", he continued.

Both the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector, Richard N. Owen, editor, and the Kentucky Western Recorder, C. R. Daley, editor, strongly attacked the Becker amendment.

Daley said the proposal first provides for voluntary prayer and Bible reading in the public schools, which is needless because "the First Amendment already provides this." It then "provides for the guarantee of the use of government channels for the propagation of religion" which "poses a real threat to freedom of religion from state control," he continued.

The Baptist and Reflector said this "could lead directly to branches of the government determining what specific kinds of religious ideas, experiences and activities shall be promoted at the taxpayer's expense...."

The third section of the proposal, Daley said, "is designed to prevent any practices provided for in the first two sections of his proposal from being construed as a violation of the First Amendment. In essence it cancels the First Amendment."

"It does appear that Baptists, of all people," said the Baptist Standard, "should realize how precious and necessary this religious freedom is and how essential it is that we oppose any slight change in the Amendment that guarantees it to us."

Reminding Baptists of the role their forefathers played in securing religious liberty in America, James F. Cole, in the Baptist Message, said, "The tragedy of tragedies would be for some of their offspring to help scrap the First Amendment."

"Let us preserve the First Amendment as is, unamended," urged the Florida Baptist Witness, "let us assume our own personal responsibility for teaching the Scriptures in the home and in the church; let us help our children to understand that people who really know what prayer is can pray wherever they happen to be, and that the right to pray can be neither conferred nor denied by legal pronouncement."

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Maryland Clergymen
Hit Prayer Proposals

(4-24-64)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Forty religious leaders from nine denominations in the State of Maryland met with Congressmen here to plead for continuation of the First Amendment "as it now stands" and to oppose proposed constitutional amendments relating to prayers and Bible reading in the public schools.

The meeting took place the day before the House Judiciary Committee opened hearings on the "Becker amendment" and others to alter the meaning of the First Amendment.

Rep. Charles McC. Mathias, Jr. (R., Md.) worked with two Baptist editors to arrange the meeting. Gainer E. Bryan, Jr., Baltimore, editor of the Maryland Baptist, and James O. Duncan, Washington, editor of the Capital Baptist took the lead in getting the Maryland churchmen to Capitol Hill.

Mathias invited the entire Maryland congressional delegation to be present at the meeting. Four congressmen put in their appearance. They were Edward A. Garmatz (D.), Clarence D. Long (D.), Carlton R. Sickles (D.) and Mathias.

Sickles, a Roman Catholic, told the clergymen that he was for the Constitution "exactly the way it is," and that he had refused to sign the discharge petition to bypass hearings on proposed amendments.

In a television interview following the meeting Sickles predicted that there would be no change in the First Amendment.

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Long commented that "the public doesn't understand either what the Supreme Court said or the Becker amendment." He said he wanted a full debate of the issues, and that this could be done only through the hearings before the Committee.

Pointing out that many Congressmen are religious men, Long said, "I believe in prayer and do a lot of it myself - especially near election time."

Mathias said that he refused to sign the discharge petition because a legislative record on the proposed amendments is needed. He also said that any change in the Bill of Rights is too important without hearing fully the views of responsible people.

Spokesmen supporting the Supreme Court decisions on Bible reading and prayers in schools were from the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Jews, Seventh Day Adventists, Quakers, United Church, Ethical Society, United Church of Christ and the Episcopalians. Telegrams supporting the testimony of the others were received by the Congressmen from Roman Catholic and Disciples of Christ members from Maryland.

Leland Higginbotham, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church of Towson, Md., and chairman of the Christian Life Committee of the Baptist Convention of Maryland, hit hard at the proposals to change the First Amendment.

The Becker amendment, Higginbotham pointed out, is so "generalized and non-specific" that "rather than extending the free exercise of religion it would actually tend to limit it and would destroy religious liberty for any minority."

The Baptist spokesman said that public institutions could not solve the problems of religious exercises "without inevitably placing government in the position of establishing a particular form of religious practice."

Higginbotham insisted that the Becker amendment is "self-contradictory." He said that it first provides "the government the means to establish any form of religious practice or expression thereof," and then declares that these "do not establish religion."

"Such ambiguity goes far toward the day when government may actually control the religious life of the community or thereby even prohibit the exercise of religious faith should an irreligious majority gain control," he pointed out.

Testimony for Bishop John Wesley Lord of the Washington area of the Methodist Church was read by Elgar Soper, pastor of the Oxon Hills Methodist Church, Washington, D. C.

Lord said, "There is no need for a 'prayer amendment,' and such amendments as are being proposed would open the doors to more serious religious problems than we now face."

"We hesitate to suggest that proposers of prayer amendments might be politically motivated," Lord continued, "but we raise a flag of caution...We need respect for the heritage of the free exercise of religion granted by the First Amendment in its present form."

Others who testified were: Fred M. Webber, United Presbyterian Church, USA, Baltimore; Samuel Rosenblatt, chairman of the Baltimore Board of Rabbis; Arthur Liesz, a religious liberty secretary of the Seventh Day Adventists; Arnold Vought, Baltimore Quaker leader; Mrs. Allan Hirsch, Jr., Baltimore Federation of Jewish Women; Richard Batzler, St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Baltimore; Mrs. Dolores Seldon, Baltimore Ethical Society; and L. Wade Hampton, an Episcopalian rector from Maryland.

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Baptist School Asks
Federal Loan

(4-24-64)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- A Baptist school is one of 26 colleges applying for a total of \$36,261,000 in college housing loans, according to Commissioner Sidney H. Woolner of the Community Facilities Administration.

Benedict College, an American Baptist school in Columbia, S. C., applied for a \$400,000 loan. Also making application for college housing loans are four Presbyterian schools, five Methodists and three Roman Catholics.

Earlier Salem (W. Va.) College, a Seventh Day Baptist school, was approved for a \$425,000 loan for dormitory expansion and dining facilities. During the same period 12 other church-related colleges were approved for loans totaling \$7,335,000.

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Illinois Board Debate
Erupts Over BSU Center

CARBONDALE, ILL. (BP)--The Board of Directors of the Illinois Baptist State Association authorized construction of a new Baptist Student Center at Southern Illinois University here after a three-hour debate.

By a vote of 51-8, the Board approved construction of the new student center at a cost not to exceed \$875,000.

A substitute motion which would have postponed action on the student center construction until the state convention next fall was defeated by a 44-16 vote.

The motion to postpone action was made by a group of 11 Baptist pastors who said they served churches which gave \$140,000 annually to missions.

The same group of pastors led efforts in the 1963 Illinois Convention in East St. Louis to appoint a special committee to study the student center construction.

Both the Convention last fall and the Board of Directors in April defeated the pastors' proposals, giving instead a vote of confidence to its education committee.

The Board's vote climaxes a two-year debate over the State Association's education program following the 1962 sale of the Southern Illinois College of Bible (Baptist owned) property to the state-supported Southern Illinois University for \$355,000 plus 1.7 acres of property near the state campus.

In other action, the Illinois Board elected Charles Gray as Baptist Student Union director at the Southern Illinois University. Gray had been serving in an interim capacity.

The Sunday School committee submitted the resignation of Wheeler Thompson, Sunday School secretary for the past 15 years who will retire effective Sept. 30, 1964.

The Board authorized its executive committee to employ a successor to Wheeler and to fill two other state Baptist staff vacancies should committees bring recommendations before the next board meeting.

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Brotherhood Program Post
Goes To George Euting

(4-24-64)

MEMPHIS (BP)--George L. Euting of Richmond, Va., has been named Director of the Program Development Division of the Brotherhood Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Euting, who was head of the Brotherhood Department for Virginia Baptists, succeeds James M. Sapp, who resigned two months ago to accept an assignment with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs at Washington, D. C.

George W. Schroeder, executive secretary of the Brotherhood Commission, who announced the appointment, said Euting will report for work June 15 at Memphis, Tenn.

An ordained minister, Euting has directed Brotherhood work in Virginia since 1956. He conducted evangelistic campaigns involving Virginia laymen in North Dakota and South Dakota and inspected Baptist missions progress in Cuba, Mexico, and South America.

Euting, who is 44, is a graduate of the University of Richmond and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at Fort Worth, Tex.

In his new assignment he will be responsible for helping develop and promote programs of missionary education and missions promotion for 390,000 Brotherhood men and 245,000 Royal Ambassadors in more than 17,000 Southern Baptist churches.

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Church Music Department
Established In Virginia

(4-24-64)

RICHMOND (BP)--The General Board of the Virginia Baptist General Association here voted to establish a church music department and adopted a tentative 1965 budget.

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Until now the office of Church Music has been a part of the Training Union department. The board voted to make it a separate department. Allen Brown, presently director of Church Music, will be the secretary of the new department.

A tentative 1965 budget of \$4 million was adopted, an increase over the 1964 budget which was \$3,570,000. The Southern Baptist Convention share of the funds was set at 37 per cent, the same percentage as for 1964. The budget is subject to final action in October.

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Youth Workers Name
Porter Chairman

(4-24-64)

ATLANTA (BP)--The conference of youth workers of SBC agencies took on a decided Home Mission accent in its annual meeting here this week.

The group met at the Home Mission Board, attended a commissioning service for Home missionaries, heard two Home Mission speakers, and elected as its chairman one of the Mission Board's staff.

Nathan Porter of Atlanta, associate secretary for Missionary Personnel of the Home Mission Board, succeeded Howard Bramlett of Nashville as chairman of the conference.

Elected as vice chairman was D. P. Brooks, editor of Young People's lesson material for the Sunday School Department of the Sunday School Board, and as secretary, Laurella Owens of Birmingham, editor of "The Window," a publication of Woman's Missionary Union.

Porter said the annual meeting provides a time for the sharing of related problems, new materials, experiences, and to do some creative thinking in working with Southern Baptist youth.

The group heard Bill Crews of Atlanta, director of Juvenile Rehabilitation for the Home Mission Board, discuss needed steps in helping prevent youth delinquency.

Victor Glass, also of Atlanta and associate secretary of the Home Mission Board's department of work with National Baptists, asked the group's aid with the more than 600 Negro youth who are volunteering each year for church related vocations.

The conference meets next year May 28-29 in Dallas.

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Note to Editors of Baptist state papers:

Hearings on proposed prayer amendments to the Constitution began Wednesday, April 22, before the House Judiciary Committee. The current plan is to have hearings Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday each week for four weeks. Each day we could have a news story for you, but this would be more copy than you could handle. If it is agreeable, on Monday of each week I will put a story in the mail giving a round-up and interpretation of the developments in the Judiciary Committee for the last three days of the preceding week. Of course, if there are unusual developments or specific Baptist angles that develop, we may have other stories as the hearings proceed. These hearing proceed daily from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. or later, so you see the problem of reporting we are having.

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