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Independent Baptist
Faces Trial in Chicago

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By Dallas M. Lee

CHICAGO (BP)--A Baptist preacher who has been embroiled since June in a snowballing church-state scrap will go to trial on Oct. 13 to contest his arrest for passing out religious literature.

Vernon Lyons, pastor of the Independent Ashburn Baptist Church of Chicago, said he was taking the case to court because his arrest was a "case of clear religious discrimination" and because more vital church-state issues are at stake.

Lyons was arrested on June 24 in Chicago's Grant Park while passing out booklets containing portions of the Book of Acts.

He was charged with violating two park district ordinances: one that forbids distribution of material containing commercial advertising and one that prohibits littering.

Lyons could not explain the "commercial advertising" charge and he said none of the booklets were on the ground as litter.

About a month later Mrs. Veronica Bernico, a member of the Good Shepherd Bible Church, was arrested on the same charges while handing out tracts at a Soldier's Field event.

She too will face trial by jury, on Sept. 28.

Lyons pleaded not guilty and petitioned the court for a change of venue on the grounds that a free trial is impossible because "the Catholic Archdiocese and the Liberal Church Federation form a religious power block that pretends to speak for all the people of Chicago and attempts to silence and intimidate those not affiliated with these organizations."

He said the request was granted by the lower court but later denied by the Chief Judge of the Municipal Court.

Lyons said the bigger issue was a "religious power structure" within the city. He said he was referring to the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race, an ecumenical organization cosponsored by the Church Federation, the Catholic Archdiocese, and the Chicago Board of Rabbis.

He said he could document "ties between that organization and the government of the city."

When asked to give examples of these "ties," Lyons cited a \$154,000 grant to CCRR, which he mentioned in his petition for a change of venue as designated "for the purposes of intimidating employers in the hiring of employees."

Howard Smith, executive director of CCRR, said the grant was awarded by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), not the city, and that the money was earmarked for CCRR's eight employment offices in Chicago slum areas. He said CCRR has found jobs for 500 people in the last three months.

Lyons also said Martin Luther King and Mayor Daley of Chicago reached agreement over recent racial strife in a meeting called and sponsored by the CCRR, not by the city or by King.

Smith said CCRR just acted as host. "We saw that the city was racially tense," he said, "and we acted in a role of reconciliation."

Lyons charged that CCRR has said for so long that it represents all the churches that religious groups outside the organization cannot get prime radio or TV time or purchase property in new housing areas.

Smith said that charge was "preposterous."

Referring to the issue at hand, Lyons said he would "sweep the matter under the rug" if he were the only one involved. "But there were two arrests this summer and I know of a dozen other instances when people were harassed while passing out religious literature."

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He said Christian people "from all over the city" had called to encourage him to fight the case.

Lyons' church, which is not affiliated with any denominational convention or organization, runs about 450 on Sunday mornings. He has been pastor there for 15 years.

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SBC Executive Committee
Asks Church-State Study

9/22/66

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention voted here to request a systematic study of the issue of separation of church and state to assist in the current two-year Baptist Education Study Task (BEST).

The Executive Committee asked "for more systematic information on church-state relations to be provided by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs," with offices in Washington, D. C.

The request suggested that the study be carried forward as far as possible by January of 1967 to aid the 24 regional seminars as a part of the two-year BEST study, and that the project be continued until completed for general use.

Earlier, the 58-member SBC Executive Committee heard a lengthy report of the BEST Findings Committee's analysis of the results of the first national study conference. The conference was held in Nashville, June 13-16, but the Findings Committee report was not developed and released until the Sept. 20 Executive Committee meeting.

The Executive Committee, however, took no action on the complete Findings Committee report, approving only the request that the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs make the study of church-state relations concerning all Baptist institutions.

In other major business actions, the Executive Committee authorized a committee study on the possibility of establishing a new capital needs program for the convention; adopted two resolutions commending the new Annuity Board benefit programs; approved provisions for increasing endowments of SBC seminaries with less than \$500,000 in endowment; authorized Baptist Memorial Hospital in Jacksonville, Fla., to negotiate a self-liquidating loan for building expansion; allocated up to \$25,000 for completion of the Baptist Education Study Task; and authorized increase in the funds available from the SBC Home Mission Board for church extension loans.

The Executive Committee reported that its administrative and public relations committees were studying the possibility and advisability of changing the name of the Southern Baptist Convention. The SBC meeting in Detroit last June asked the Executive Committee to do further study on the proposal.

An entire evening's session was devoted to the report of the Baptist Education Study Task Findings Committee, and to a panel discussion of the problems of both rural and urban churches caused by the migration of many Baptists from rural to urban areas.

The BEST Findings Committee report, a six-page printed document, gave the 18-member committee's "impressions that came out of the discussions of those attending the first national conference (as part of BEST) in June, 1966. The final report will not be made until the summer of 1967, after discussion by about 300 study groups in the winter of 1966-67 and after the meeting of the second national study conference, June 12-15, 1967."

Herschel H. Hobbs of Oklahoma City, chairman of the Findings Committee, made the report, which listed in detail the problems that are facing Baptist higher education in seven specific areas: philosophy, religious scope, academic scope, the Christian college teacher, financing, college-denominational relationships, and academic freedom and responsibility.

The Findings Committee summarized and interpreted the opinions expressed in eight different sectional meetings of the June conference, each dealing with one of the seven areas listed above. Two sections dealt with financing Christian higher education.

"There was agreement by all the groups that there is urgent need for a clear statement of the philosophy, purposes, and objectives of Baptist higher education," the report said.

"All sections devoted some time to the controversial question of accepting funds for Baptist institutions from governmental sources," it continued.

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The Findings Committee also reported: "It was the opinion of the majority of those studying college financing that in the several states the board of trustees of each institution should be recognized as having discretion in accepting or rejecting government aid, including loans and grants, provided that those accepted be free of unreasonable restrictions which would limit the operation of the institution as a church-related school."

"It was evident that equally honest and dedicated individuals held diametrically opposed positions," the report said. "There was a lack of specific knowledge of the facts in the area of church-state relations, and of the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963."

In another summary statement, the Findings Committee said that "Although most of the reports (from the eight sections) reflected the opinion that Baptist higher education is a basic need of the denomination, there was considerable doubt in the minds of a few participants that there is strong commitment on this point among the majority of Baptists."

Although the lengthy report was summarized during the Executive Committee meeting, no action by the full committee was taken or expected on the entire report.

In two related actions, however, the Executive Committee approved up to \$25,000 in allocations to the Education Commission of the SBC to finance completion of BEST, and asked the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs to assist in providing a factual study of the church-state separation issue.

Other actions of the Executive Committee included:

--Authorization for the SBC Home Mission Board to increase the percentage of its assets which may be pledged as collateral for loans to Baptist churches from 50 per cent to 75 per cent, making an additional \$3 million available to back church loans.

--Transferred to the Southern Baptist Foundation current assets in the SBC Operating budget in excess of \$800,000 at the beginning of each year, with provisions that income from this fund be distributed to SBC seminaries with less than \$500,000 endowment until their endowments reach that amount.

--Granted permission to Baptist Memorial Hospital, Jacksonville, Fla., for a self-liquidating loan of \$11.1 million to expand hospital facilities up to \$22.3 million.

--Authorized appointment of a committee to study the possibility of the SBC entering a new capital needs program, requesting the committee to submit in February a definition of capital needs and a calendar and procedure for finishing its work by 1968.

--Adopted two resolutions commending the new Annuity Board program which must be adopted by each state Baptist convention, one urging all channels of communication be opened to acquaint Southern Baptists with the expanded provisions for disability and retirement benefits, and the other urging the state Baptist conventions to adopt the program.

--Approved a proposed 1967 Executive Committee operating budget of \$259,000, an increase of \$11,000 over the 1966 operating budget.

--Authorized appointment to the SBC Crusade of America committee H. Franklin Paschall, the current president of the SBC, his successor in office when elected, the program planning secretary of the Executive Committee, and the chairman of the Executive Committee.

--Allocated \$5,000 to Religion in American Life to help meet emergency needs in development of its program of reaching millions of Americans in free advertising space concerning spiritual values and the importance of church attendance.

--Authorized Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, to borrow up to \$40,000 from the SBC operating budget at no interest, provided it is repaid by the end of 1968.

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Prayer Amendment
Refused By Senate

9/22/66

By Beth Hayworth

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U. S. Senate rejected Sen. Everett M. Dirksen's (R., Ill.) effort to amend the Constitution of the United States to authorize schools and other government institutions to permit or provide for "voluntary" prayers in public schools.

Dirksen offered his prayer proposal as an amendment to a UNICEF resolution, designating Halloween as United Nations Educational Day.

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The Senate also refused to adopt Sen. Birch Bayh's (D., Ind.) resolution to give the "sense of Congress" on the Supreme Court's ruling against compulsory prayers and Bible reading in the public school.

Bayh's resolution was offered as a substitute for the Dirksen "prayer" proposal. It would have had no legal effect.

Bayh's substitute proposal would have authorized the president to proclaim Thanksgiving day as National Prayer and Meditation Week. It also set forth an interpretation of the Supreme Court decisions which he claimed would clarify the confusion in the nation.

The vote on the Bayh resolution was defeated 52 to 33. Many of the congressmen voted against the resolution because they felt it was not the function of Congress to interpret decisions of the Supreme Court.

The vote on the Dirksen amendment, 49 to 37, fell nine short of the two-thirds majority needed for a constitutional amendment.

Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr., (D., N.C.) joined with Sen. Bayh to lead the fight against the Dirksen amendment. Ervin said Dirksen's prayer proposal would lead to the "establishment of religion" by school authorities who could proscribe any form of religious ritual they might choose--Catholic in some areas, Jewish in others, Protestant in still others.

"We must retain religious freedom for all men," Ervin declared. He said the proposed Dirksen amendment would "destroy the purpose of the First Amendment."

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D., Montana) said the First Amendment to the Constitution says in "non-lawyer language that the government--federal, state, or local--shall keep out of the field of religion."

He expressed the view that the Supreme Court was merely enforcing this "no trespassing" sign when it forbade the reading of a state-composed prayer or a passage from a Bible in a public school.

Mansfield said further that "the remedy for irreligion in our society is in the home--not in the Congress."

The issue is an outgrowth of the 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court rulings that state-sponsored prayers and Bible readings in the public schools are unconstitutional.

School officials in some states have variously interpreted the rulings to mean that Christmas programs, baccalaureate sermons, the singing of the national anthem, and other religious traditions and references to God in the public schools are no longer permissible.

Dirksen equated the elimination of such religious traditions with the elimination of Santa Claus in Soviet Russia.

Following the Senate decision, Dirksen refused to concede that the issue is dead. He vowed a continuation of his fight and said that an organized national crusade would be developed next year.

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CORRECTION

9/22/66

On BP story mailed 9/14/66, headlined: "Texas Church-State Panel Bares Report." Graph 15 as sent (the 2nd graph on page 4 of the mailing), should read: "The record budget, an increase of more than \$500,000 over the 1966 budget, must get . . ." The figure \$200,000 as sent is the amount of increase over the 1966 total goal, but the increase over the actual budget is more than \$500,000.

--Baptist Press