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Baptist Editors Debate
 Colleges' Federal Grants

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MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--Two Baptist editors debated here the issue of Baptist schools' accepting federal grants, but neither was declared "the winner."

Editor Erwin L. McDonald of the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine in Little Rock flatly declared that he favored federal grants for building construction at Baptist colleges and universities, listing five reasons why.

Editor Gene Puckett of The Maryland Baptist in Baltimore just as staunchly opposed federal grants, citing three major reasons and attempting to refute some of McDonald's.

Neither, however, was declared the winner in the debate, since its purpose was to present both sides of the issue before the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Press Association here.

McDonald, who spoke first, explained that in recent years his views had changed, having once advocated complete separation of church and state. His five reasons for favoring federal grants were:

1. Higher education is a field of mutual concern and responsibility for both church and state, and they can best serve the needs of society by working together.
2. There is no other way but the acceptance of federal grants for Baptists to continue to have their colleges and be able to provide high quality education.
3. The Christian influence exerted in non-religious courses offered by Baptist colleges does not involve indoctrination and therefore does not violate the First Amendment of the Constitution.
4. In our democracy, the state is governed by our own people, and the danger of despotic controls being exerted upon colleges accepting government grants is practically nil.
5. Both Baptist history and current Baptist practice illustrate that church and state can work together without impairing the basic rights and privileges of either.

Saying this is an era of church-state cooperation on social and educational affairs, McDonald urged Baptists to "face up to the realities of life and set our sails to make the best possible use of the winds that are blowing."

He said he would prefer Baptists to support their schools voluntarily, but is "convinced that Baptists are not going to provide the finances necessary to sustain their schools."

Puckett, however, argued that it is illegal, unethical and impractical for Baptist schools to accept federal grants.

"Baptist colleges and universities cannot survive if they accept federal grants," Puckett declared.

"Survive as an institution, they may; but Baptist they will not be," he stated.

The Maryland editor listed three major reasons; (1) the legal prohibition, (2) the moral and ethical prohibition, and (3) the pragmatic or practical prohibition.

He cited the Horrace Mann case ruling by the Maryland Court of Appeals, which declared unconstitutional federal grants to three colleges and listed six standards used in judging the degree that the schools were religious institutions. He stated that the U. S. Supreme Court had allowed the Maryland court decision to stand by refusing to hear it.

Pucket contended that if Baptist schools accepted federal grants they would "deny the very purpose of their existence." He said for years he had heard the schools beg for financial support from the churches, saying they were "an extention of the churches" in evangelism, missions and education.

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If this is their purpose, a government grant would be a direct support of a religious faith with tax money, he argued.

Accepting government grants would change the nature of the college by a process of gradual evolution, and grants would force them to accept economic determinism of their future, Puckett said. Thus they would cease to be "Baptist" institutions, but remain educational institutions.

Neither Puckett nor McDonald commented on an earlier proposal made by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Duke K. McCall in an address to the Baptist Press Association and the executive secretaries of state Baptist conventions.

McCall urged a legislative campaign to change the method of making government grants to schools instead of aid to students, following the pattern set by Medicare.

Aid to students rather than aid to institutions would give the students more freedom of choice to attend the school of his preference, McCall said. He explained that 85 per cent of the Baptist students in America attend state-supported schools, and many would attend Baptist schools if they could afford it.

McCall also urged Baptist leaders to discover ways that "data about religion" can be taught in public schools, saying that education and religion must not be divorced.

Following the opening banquet here when the editors and state Baptist convention executive secretaries met jointly, the two groups split for separate meetings.

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Former Seminary Trustee
Chairman, Steger, Dies

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FORT WORTH (BP)--Joseph Hamilton Steger, chairman of the board of trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here from 1963 to 1965, died in a local hospital Feb. 11. He had been in ill health the past 15 months.

Steger, a trustee from 1955 to 1965, was a graduate of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, and Baylor University Medical School.

He had practiced medicine in Fort Worth for 30 years.

He is survived by his wife, the former Helen Presley, who attended Southwestern Seminary and two children: Sally Kathryn Oxford (Mrs. Neil) and Thomas Hamilton, a student at San Marcos Baptist Academy, San Marcos, Tex.

Funeral services were conducted at the Travis Avenue Baptist Church, where he held membership and was active in all the church organizations.

President Robert E. Naylor of the seminary and a former pastor, James E. Coggin, pastor of the Travis Ave. church, and A. Donald Bell, a Southwestern professor and close friend officiated at the funeral services.

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CUTLINES

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

OCEAN-SIDE HOTELS face the Atlantic at Miami Beach, site of the 1967 session of the Southern Baptist Convention, May 30-June 2. At left is the Seville Hotel, one of two convention headquarters hotels. The other is the Sea Isle. (BP PHOTO)

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CUTLINES

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

A SHOPPING PROMENADE, Lincoln Mall, is located within a few blocks of the meeting place for the 1967 Southern Baptist Convention in Miami Beach (May 30-June 2). The mall is landscaped with flowers, palms, pools and fountains. Electric trams make a complete tour of the mall in 15 minutes, and are the only vehicles permitted. (BP PHOTO)

CUTLINES

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

SAND AND SURF, framed by a swaying palm with its green foliage turned white by infra-red photography, depict the beauty and recreation which will greet messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in Miami Beach, May 30-June 2. (BP PHOTO by Miami Beach News Bureau)

CUTLINES

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

MIAMI BEACH, as seen from the air, shows off its 379 hotels, many of them facing the blue-green waters of the Atlantic, or Biscayne Bay (background) which divides Miami Beach from the city of Miami. (BP PHOTO)

CUTLINES

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

SUNRISE OVER THE ATLANTIC will greet early risers who attend the Southern Baptist Convention in Miami Beach, May 30-June 2. Later the people will arrive, but sunrise finds the sands undisturbed. (BP PHOTO)

CUTLINES

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

CONVENTION HALL in Miami Beach is the meeting place for the 1967 Southern Baptist Convention, May 30-June 2. The auditorium seats more than 15,000, about the same number expected to attend the convention's 1967 session. (BP PHOTO)

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