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March 7, 1969

**Baptist Group Opposes
Vatican Representation**

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in semi-annual session here urged President Richard M. Nixon "to avoid naming a permanent representative to the Roman Catholic Church or to any other church."

The Baptist body encouraged the President in his efforts toward world peace "to make widest use of the present and emerging informal relationships open to him."

"We believe that the national interests and the cause of peace are served best by flexible and informal means of church-state consultations rather than by formal diplomatic relations," the committee said.

The Baptist action was taken after consideration of the President's announcement to the nation through a press conference that he and the State Department are considering a permanent representative of the U. S. government to the Vatican.

The President said that he had not yet decided whether or not the lines of communication with the Vatican could "be kept open based on the present facilities that are available."

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs is maintained by eight Baptist bodies in North America (American Baptist Convention, Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist General Conference, North American Baptist General Conference, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., Baptist Federation of Canada, Seventh Day Baptist General Conference). C. Emanuel Carlson is executive director.

The Baptist Joint Committee in effect endorsed the views expressed in a "Staff Report on Diplomatic Relations with the Vatican" published in April, 1968. The report pointed out that many leading Roman Catholics themselves are now opposing diplomatic representation by the U. S. to the Vatican.

This shifting Catholic position is being taken in the light of the new spirit of good will between Catholics and nonCatholics generated by Vatican Council II and its declaration on religious freedom, the report found.

The report indicated that existing channels of communication between the Vatican and the United States government are open for a free flow of information.

"Certainly, the Vatican does not withhold information from the United States useful to these ends (world peace, order and justice) just because America sends no diplomatic representatives to it. This is inconceivable," the report observed.

According to the report, there are at least three open channels of communication now existing between the Vatican and the U.S. government:

1. The Vatican can communicate with the U. S. government in the way any religious group communicates with it.
2. The Vatican maintains an Apostolic Delegate in Washington on Massachusetts Avenue in the manner of an ambassador.
3. Since Rome is at once the capital of Italy and the location of the Vatican, the U. S. has an Embassy in Rome already.

The staff report concluded that the grounds for traditional United States policy of no official representation to the Vatican have validity. It also observed that "the dynamic developments within the Roman Catholic Church make this an improper time to change the policy."

TEXT OF STATEMENT

Here is the full text of the statement by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs:

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"The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in plenary session on March 6, 1969, in Washington, D. C., after consideration of the text of the presidential news conference of March 4, unanimously adopted the following statement concerning the establishment of permanent representation to the Vatican:

"Recognizing that the intricate relationships involved in world peace require the widest range of perception and communication, we believe that the national interests and the cause of peace are served best by flexible and informal means of church-state consultations rather than by formal diplomatic relations. In line with the staff report of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, diplomatic relations with the Vatican, published in April 1968, we respectfully request the President to make widest use of the present and emerging informal relationships open to him; and, consistent with the American model of church-state relationships, to avoid naming a permanent representative to the Roman Catholic Church or to any other church."

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Baptists Are Urged To
Work For Unified Nation

(3-7-69)

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in semi-annual session here joined in call to its constituent bodies "to act to bring a new order in American life of justice and unity."

The statement with which the Baptist Joint Committee concurred was signed by 48 Baptists who attended its National Religious Liberty Conference last October. It was referred to the March meeting of the committee.

C. Emanuel Carlson, executive director, said that the Baptist Joint Committee exists, among other things, for the purposes set forth in the statement.

Here is the text of the document referred to the Baptist Joint Committee by its 48 signers:

A STATEMENT OF INTENT

"The liberties of men are one and inseparable. America moves toward two societies separate and unequal, as our conventions pass their resolutions and exercise their religious liberty without enough effort or action to build one society, integrated in life and opportunity. We call upon the several conventions to exercise their freedom and liberty,--religious, political, civil and personal--to act to bring a new order in American life of justice and unity. As churches, conventions and Christians we declare the urgent need for the integration of the life, work and actions of the church to work for one world in the total life of the United States. And so provide a new and powerful force for good in the international arena."

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Baptist Body Reaffirms
1st Amendment Freedoms

(3-6-69)

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in semi-annual session here reaffirmed its position that the First Amendment to the Constitution is adequate protection in law for religious liberty.

The action was taken in view of hearings that may be scheduled by the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments to consider proposed "prayer amendments" that are designed to undo the Supreme Court decisions on religion in public schools.

The most prominent of these proposals is the so-called Dirksen Amendment.

This proposal, submitted by Sen. Everett M. Dirksen (R., Ill.) says, "Nothing in this Constitution shall abridge the right of persons lawfully assembled, in any public building which is supported in whole or in part through the expenditure of public funds, to participate in non-denominational prayer."

It is the intent of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments to announce within the next three months that hearings on the Dirksen Amendment will be scheduled.

In instructing its staff for testimony at these hearings, the Baptist Joint Committee did not address itself directly to the Dirksen Amendment but reaffirmed its long-standing position that the First Amendment is adequate.

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The affirmed resolution (originally approved in 1964) says in part:

"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.'"

In the same resolution the Baptist Joint Committee appealed "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."

The committee also appealed to Baptists to communicate their viewpoints on religious liberty to their representatives in government. "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," the committee said.

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Churches And Taxation
To Be Subject Of Study

(3-7-69)

WASHINGTON (BP)--Principles of religious liberty and tax reform will be the subject of a paper to be produced by the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The committee in semi-annual session here instructed its staff to continue work on the problem of taxation and the churches and their agencies. After the staff work is done, the paper will be taken back to the committee for consideration.

The action was taken after C. Emanuel Carlson, executive director, read a "trial balloon" paper on taxation to the committee. His paper on some concepts relating to church taxation, evoked favorable response from several committee members.

The problem of taxation of churches and their agencies has been brought into special focus by hearings conducted by the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives in the U. S. Congress.

In addition, many of the state governments are reassessing their policies in relation to tax exemption for churches and charitable organizations.

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Alabama Baptists Vote \$10,000
For Biafrican-Nigerian Relief

(3-7-69)

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)--The Alabama Baptist Convention administration committee has voted to send \$10,000 to buy food and supplies for refugees on both sides of the Biafrican-Nigerian conflict.

The action marks the first time that a Baptist state convention within the Southern Baptist Convention has given official recognition of the needs of the starving people of the Biafrican-Nigeria conflict, and has provided financial relief aid.

The Baptist convention administration committee responded to an impassioned plea from a Birmingham pastor "to do something in the name of Christ, in a place where the roots of disorder are agonizingly complex."

Louis Wilhite, pastor of the West End Baptist Church here, who made the plea, pointed out that the Southern Baptist Convention had already given \$100,000 in relief, and that other religious and government groups were giving millions.

The administration committee, headed by John Bob Riddle, pastor of the Central Park Baptist Church, Birmingham, and president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, voted unanimously to send the \$10,000 to the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board. The funds will be administered by the board where the need is the greatest.

When told that the committee had voted to send the \$10,000, the Birmingham minister responded "I do have warm affirmative feelings about their response. I am grateful that Alabama Baptists are doing something tangible to help meet these very complex needs."

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Wilhite, whose ministry in Birmingham has attracted a large number of young people in that area said, "I think our young people are idealistic, looking for something outside the routine, a challenge in some humanitarian project. They will identify with this action by Alabama Baptists, and with the leaders within the structure of the church who have likewise expressed their Christian humanitarianism."

Appointed chairman of the committee to head a state-wide drive to raise money for the Biafrican-Nigerian relief was D. M. Nelson, pastor of the Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham.

"We can now do something to help save lives and starvation," Nelson said. "This I do gladly and will give my energy and efforts to give Alabama Baptists an opportunity to give to save a child."

Plans for the fund drive will be announced in the near future. Wilhite, whose church has already sent \$4,200 to Biafrican-Nigerian relief, plans to go to the area himself this spring, to observe, and return to inform the people about the conditions and needs there.

He said, "If no more, I'll go over and cry with them and then come back and cry over here, to share the agony and the suffering of these people."

Wilhite's interest in the situation was first sparked last summer when he was camp pastor at a youth retreat at Panama City, Fla., for First Baptist Church, Montgomery, youth. It was during this week that Life magazine came out with its coverage of the starvation in Biafrica-Nigeria.

At about the same time, a Southern Baptist medical missionary in Nigeria from Alabama, Dr. Bill Norman, was seeking to escape from Biafrica. For a period of several weeks, it was not known where Dr. Norman was in Nigeria.

As Wilhite learned more about the conditions in Africa, he kept asking, "How can we as a state convention stand by and watch when millions are literally starving to death?"

The Birmingham minister contacted H. Cornell Goerner, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board secretary for Africa. Goerner pointed out that the Southern Baptist Convention had no authority to raise such a relief fund but made it clear that individual states could assume this responsibility.

He also reported that a new and more sympathetic attitude was emerging through relief efforts. The mission leader, cautioned, however, that the appeal specify Biafrican-Nigerian Relief, which would include either liberated or encircled areas.



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