

**BAPTIST PRESS**

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**Baptists Join Fight Against
Proposed School Voucher Plan**

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists have joined a score of national organizations with membership over 34 million to oppose proposed educational voucher experiments which would provide public funds to private and parochial schools as well as to public schools.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in its semiannual meeting here expressed its concern for quality education in the nation. The committee in a statement expressed hope that experiments using public funds for the improvement of education "will be carried out within the framework of public schools, as we have traditionally know them.

"We point out that there is a dangerous blurring of the separation between church and state as public funds are channeled into religiously owned and operated schools," the Baptist Joint Committee statement continued. It charged as "unwarranted" a redefinition of "public school" as one which is open to all segments of the public.

At the September meeting of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention a resolution was approved which opposed "the implementation of any educational voucher system which would permit the use of public funds either directly or indirectly by private church-related elementary and secondary schools."

An informal coalition of education, religious and civil rights organizations in the nation's capital has taken action to halt proposed educational voucher experiments in the Office of Economic Opportunity until public hearings are held and until adequate safeguards are built in to assure the best interests of public education.

In brief, the proposed experiment would provide educational vouchers to parents in amounts roughly equal to the current expenditures of the public schools in their community. The parents would then be free to use the vouchers as tuition for their children in the school of their choice, public, private or parochial. Payment would be made to the school and not to the pupil or parents.

The purpose of such an experiment, according to Donald Rumsfeld, director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, would be to determine whether parental choice of schools would improve the quality of education in the nation. This improvement, supposedly, would result from competition among the various types of schools for the educational dollars provided by the vouchers.

Rumsfeld charges that those opposing the voucher plan are simply opposed to experiment in education and that their concern is the preservation of the educational "establishment" rather than developing the quality of education offered to pupils.

The coalition participants deny charges and countercharge that the current administration in Washington is engaging in unjustified attacks on the public education system in the nation. Their answer to the charges of failure in the public schools is that the public has never "put its money where its mouth is" and that public education has never been given a real chance to produce quality education for all pupils.

Many of the coalition group believe that the proposed voucher experiments of OEO will: (1) create racially segregated schools, (2) develop economically segregated schools, (3) violate the principle of separation of church and state, (4) add a financial burden to the public treasury by paying for private and parochial schools in addition to the public schools, (5) produce administration disaster in all the schools, (6) have inadequate controls for quality education in nonpublic schools, and (7) create a rush of profit-making firms going into the business of educating the young.

The Baptist Joint Committee statement commended the Office of Economic Opportunity for its concern to strengthen the quality of education and to experiment with a diversity of educational approaches to meet specific needs. However, it said, "We express deep concern that the educational voucher program is not the best means to accomplish this objective."

The Baptist committee further expressed "our basic confidence in the principle of public education."

It urged "that public funds for elementary and secondary education be invested only in school systems which are publicly owned, whether for traditional ongoing educational programs or for experimental programs directed either towards upgrading the quality of general education or in meeting the specific needs of a particular locale or population segment."

The committee also expressed the belief that the proposed voucher system would weaken public education, would become an objectionable continuing program, and would "lead towards further polarization and fragmentation in the nation."

Although conflicting reports are circulated in Washington concerning the exact status of the voucher experiment plan, the OEO director stated that it is still in the discussion stage, that no firm commitments have been made yet, and that the final nature of the experiment has not yet been determined.

The coalition is attempting to develop "dialogue" between OEO and the education groups of the nation for a commonly acceptable experiment or experiments in quality education.

The coalition also is seeking to lobby in the Congress against an appropriation of funds to make the objectionable experiments impossible. The estimated cost of the experiment over the five to eight years of its life would be \$30 to \$50 million.

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Baptist Joint Committee To
Oppose Compulsory Religion

10/9/70

WASHINGTON (BP)--Members of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, in semiannual session, expressed dismay over a recent ruling of a U.S. district court judge here upholding the practice of compulsory religion at the nation's military academies.

To register formally their protest, the committee asked the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee to prepare a friend-of-the-court brief to be filed in the court of appeals here in which the principles of voluntarism and freedom of conscience would be enunciated.

The decision by Judge Howard F. Corcoran on the case, *Anderson v. Laird*, is now before the D. C. Court of Appeals. The Baptist brief will be filed later this month. Oral arguments on the case will probably be heard after the first of the year.

Judge Corcoran ruled in August that compulsory chapel or church attendance at the nation's three military academies has a "purely secular" purpose and that "its primary effect is purely secular."

The judge's opinion followed the line of Pentagon spokesmen who argued before the court last spring that the practice of compulsory religion at the academies is "an integral and necessary part" of the military's training package for officers.

Judge Corcoran also noted that "military tradition" and "continuous public acceptance" of a practice carry weight and demand recognition."

The judge's opinion was described by one member of the Baptist Joint Committee as a "fantastic act against the conscience." Roger H. Sharpe of Flint, Mich., suggested that the Baptist brief argue for tradition of freedom of conscience.

Other members condemned the military's practice as using religion "as a tool of the state" and making worship "a vehicle of secular purposes."

In a study paper prepared by the staff for the Baptist Joint Committee, certain principles were cited which should be the basis for a stand Baptists might take on the controversial court decision.

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Among these premises, spelled out in 1966 by C. Emanuel Carlson, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, are the following:

1. "Religion in the military must be in all respects a voluntary matter...,
2. "The program must respect and provide for the religious plurality in American life, making no attempt to achieve conformity or to mold or mix distinctive doctrines or worship practices.
3. "There must be recognition of the continuing and residual church responsibility of chaplains exercised by appropriate civilian religious authority.
4. "The religious content of the chaplaincy program is not properly a government responsibility nor is it the responsibility of senior supervisory chaplains who are military appointees in their supervisory capacity...."

In light of the principles of the Baptist public affairs staff said certain questions must be faced by Baptists. These are:

1. Have the churches given permission to have the gospel used by the government for purely secular purposes?
2. Have individual chaplains allow themselves to be used primarily as morale agents rather than for a religious ministry?
3. Is liturgy the best way to provide training in American religious heritage or would "free exercise" of religion be better?
4. At West Point, how can a Jew learn about Catholicism or Protestantism by attending only Jewish worship services?
5. Does the military honestly fear that free worship will fragment the cadet corps and feel that compulsory religion will increase solidarity?
6. Can we help the religious climate of the nation at the moment and also educate our people as well as the military leaders on this issue?
7. What precautions should be taken to preserve the appropriate church-state relations which exist within the chaplaincy as an institution?

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Wade Bryant, Virginia
Baptist Minister, Dies

10/9/70

RICHMOND (BP)--Wade H. Bryant, minister of visitation for the Northminister Baptist Church and former president of the Virginia Baptist General Association, died Oct. 3 at the age of 72.

A well-known Southern Baptist leader, Bryant had been pastor of Clemson University Baptist Church, the Northminister church, and First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va. He retired in 1967 when he was pastor of Derbyshire Baptist Church, also in Virginia. He was a former member of the SBC Foreign Mission Board and chairman of the board of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

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Bates Says Don't Relate
Racism To Churches Only

10/9/70

DALLAS (BP)--Integration is far more complicated than a local church problem. If it isn't handled right, it could destroy both black and white fellowships, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention said in a news conference here with Dallas media.

Carl Bates, SBC president and pastor of First Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C., declined to position himself on the conflict involving integration at the First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.

The pastor and youth director of the all-white Birmingham church resigned in September after the congregation refused to grant membership to a negro woman and her 11-year-old daughter. A majority voted to accept the negro applicants, but the church's bylaws required a two-thirds majority on any contested action after the deacons had reviewed the action.

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"It is difficult to get all the facts in such a complex situation as this," Bates said, adding that he does not feel he should "interfere in any way with the affairs of local churches."

He noted, however, that "the SBC is in no way segregated" and that the church he serves has an open door policy, although there are presently no negro members.

"We have sought to enlist negroes but did not get much response and some of the negro pastors in Charlotte resented our efforts."

He warned that even negro Baptist conventions have expressed fear of black racism.

"It goes to the heart of national life," Bates said. "If we relate racism to the church alone, we're going to miss the heart of the problem.

The SBC president was in Dallas to speak at the 40th anniversary observance of the Baptist Foundation of Texas.

During the observance it was announced at a board meeting that the foundation has made a loan of \$500,000 to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for use in church loans.

Carr P. Collins of Dallas, noted Southern Baptist philanthropist, serves as president of the Baptist Foundation, which has grown in assets from \$20 million in 1954 to \$93 million in 1970.

J. C. Cantrell, the foundation's executive secretary, estimates that assets will double by 1980 with the foundation paying out \$12 million a year by its 50th anniversary.

Bates said that something should be done about the report of the president's commission on obscenity and pornography.

"I hope they renew the study. I wish that someone in this country would get good and mad about it."

Bates was asked if he thought the action of SBC messengers last June in recalling the Broadman Bible Commentary on the Book of Genesis will discourage writers.

"The writers are working for the convention and should realize that the convention has a right to accept or reject their work," he said.

Bates re-iterated his desire to exert a "healing influence in the divisiveness that erupted at the convention in Denver over a progressive versus a conservative course of action.

"It is time for Baptists to get on with their major duty of reaching people," the SBC president said.

"We're getting back to outreach. I think we're on the verge of a great revival."



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