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July 30, 1971

**Baptist Leaders Say Prayer
Amendment Threatens Liberty**

WASHINGTON (BP)--A number of Baptist leaders in the nation have warned Congress against weakening or repudiating the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution by passing a so-called prayer amendment to permit "nondenominational prayer" in public buildings.

The top executives and elected heads of six Baptist groups, in letters and statements to Congress, declared support for the Supreme Court decisions of 1962 and 1963 which prohibited government-sponsored prayers and devotions in public schools.

At issue now in the House of Representatives is a move to pass a resolution to amend the Constitution to read: "Nothing contained 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 nondenominational prayer."

After going to Congress, such a resolution would have to be approved by a majority vote in both Houses of Congress and by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states within seven years of its passage before it becomes law.

As of July 30, 190 members of the House of Representatives have signed a discharge petition to bypass the House Judiciary Committee which has not reported the bill to the House floor. Emanuel Celler (D., N.Y.) is chairman of the committee. The discharge petition is sponsored by Rep. Chalmers P. Wylie (R. Ohio).

The president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Carl E. Bates, of Charlotte, N. C., charged that the proposed prayer amendment "could lead to excessive involvement of the state in religious matters." Bates cited, in a message to Congress, the recent action of the convention in St. Louis in which the denomination reaffirmed its belief in the adequacy of the First Amendment to protect religious liberty.

"A new amendment to the Constitution on the subject of religious liberty could seriously alter church-state relations," Bates said.

W. Hubert Porter, associate general secretary of the American Baptist Convention, in a letter to Rep. Celler urged him to do everything in his power "to defeat all efforts to weaken or evade the First Amendment.

"Crusaders for an amendment to cut the heart out of the First Amendment by making constitutional the legislation of religion can make their case sound deeply religious and superbly patriotic," Porter said in a letter entered by Celler into the July 27 issue of the Congressional Record, the official daily journal of Congress.

"They at times make it appear that the steadfast friends of the First Amendment are against God, country, and motherhood, but such an impression is a deception and a delusion," Porter charged.

"The truest friends of religion and the most constructive citizens of the state are those who support those First Amendment guarantees that have made possible in the United States of America a fuller measure of religious freedom than was previously known in the world," declared the ABC executive.

Other top Baptist executives opposing approval of the prayer amendment included S. S. Hodges of Washington, D. C., executive secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.; G. K. Zimmerman of Forest Park, Ill., the executive secretary of the North American Baptist General Conference; and Warren R. Magnuson, general secretary of the Baptist General Conference, Evanston, Ill.

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The acting executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, John W. Baker, explained that the proposed amendment to the Constitution "could circumscribe" the First Amendment in ways that would alter its meaning. It "creates ambiguities which do more harm than good for people and institutions," he said.

Baker, a political scientist, explained that the proposal raises several questions: "Does it mean that only nondenominational prayers could be prayed in a denominational or public institution which receives public funds? Who decides for an institution what is a lawful assembly? What problems are raised by the 'right of persons lawfully assembled'? Do others have the same rights? Who determines the content for a nondenominational prayer in a school--The school board, the superintendent, the principal, the teacher? If so, such a prayer becomes a government prescribed prayer," he said.

The Progressive Baptist executive, S. S. Hodges, agreed that a prayer amendment "could becloud the clear statement of the First Amendment and afford an opportunity for courts in the future to interpret the First Amendment differently."

Both Zimmerman and Magnuson voiced support for the Supreme Court decisions and their belief that no additional amendment pertaining to religious liberty is needed.

The Supreme Court decision against an "official" prayer "does not hinder individuals from praying or giving other expression of their faith," Zimmerman argued.

"Furthermore, we do not believe that the court eliminated God from our public life. It simply stated that the establishment of religion has a tendency to destroy government and to degrade religion," Zimmerman declared.

The American Baptist executive, in his letter to Rep. Celler, noted that "it is understandable that many good people are tempted to yield to the idea that the church 'has it made' when Congress puts God's name in the pledge of allegiance or prints his name on postage stamps and engraves it on a coin or perhaps supports a 'Christian amendment.'

"But such a hope is really deceptive," Porter declared. "The idea of evangelism by legislation is nothing short of a dangerous illusion.

"Moreover," Porter continued, "it is quite clearly impossible for government to legislate religion without violating the rights of many citizens." If government gets into the business of sponsoring devotions on captive audiences, Porter wondered, whose religion will it be?

"Will it be Buddhism in the state of Hawaii? Or Mormonism in the state of Utah? Or a Baptist-oriented Protestantism in the state of Georgia? Or Roman Catholicism in the state of Massachusetts? Or Judaism in New York City?" Porter asked

He declared that the welfare of religion in a pluralistic society "must lean heavily upon a strict interpretation of the First Amendment."

Another staff member of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, James M. Sapp, said he believed that "once the American people gain an understanding of the difference between true voluntary prayer on the part of an individual or group, and official, prescribed prayers, they will reject the idea of government assistance to engage in prayer or religious exercises.

"The need for government assistance for a person to pray is unthinkable," Sapp argued.

"Prayer, as we understand it, is not prayer unless it is voluntary," he continued. "Such voluntarism denies to government the power to control the time, place or content of prayer...and government should never be given the authority 'to permit' or 'not to permit' prayer in the true meaning of the word," Sapp said.

He noted that the Supreme Court had not, "and indeed could not," rule against voluntary prayer where "the individual has direct access to God."

"What the Supreme Court did," Sapp pointed out, "was to deny state authorities the power to organize and promote religious exercises."

"In the light of our best insights into the biblical basis for voluntarism, this seems to be the best hope for religious freedom for all in this country," the Baptist Joint Committee executive said.

Sapp added that he was confident that the majority of Congress would, after thoughtful consideration, "refrain from deliberately injecting a personal, religious issue into the political arena."

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Two Human Dramas Unfold
Along Texas' Rio Grande

7/30/71

by Robert O'Brien and Orville Scott

DALLAS (BP)--Maria Rayita Garcia, tiny and tormented, has gone, leaving those who loved her tinged with aching sadness but bathed in the "rayita"--little ray of sunshine--which illuminated the end of her eighth year of life.

Javier Gomez, insulated in silence during his four short years, now has a passport, doctors believe, to a new and strange world of sound.

By medical, and human, standards these two children represent one success story and one failure for Texas Baptists from El Paso to Dallas who tried to help them.

A deaf boy will hear. A little girl died after brain surgery.

The results of these two human dramas, however, have changed the lives of many around them, and transcended the "success" or "failure" of a surgical procedure.

Javier lost his hearing as an infant when severe ear infection ruptured his ear drums in his mountain village of Creel, Mexico.

Three years passed before Mrs. Priscilla Gohman of the El Paso Baptist Association staff, found him during a mission trip.

She arranged for Javier's aunt, Julia, to bring him to an ear specialist in El Paso. During the succeeding year, Priscilla financed the 800-mile round trip each month to visit the specialist.

Texas Baptists raised funds for a tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy performed before Javier came to Dallas, at the expense of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, for the delicate ear surgery.

A Christian physician, who performed the surgery at no cost, believes hearing will return completely to one ear and partial hearing to the other.

Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church here will pay hospital fees and First Mexican Baptist Church, Dallas, will provide lodging for Javier and his aunt during his recuperation.

It was while Javier recuperated from his tonsillectomy in Priscilla's home that two projects of the remarkable lady from El Paso simultaneously bore fruit.

Six-year-old Martine Madriles and his father, Pedro, arrived in El Paso enroute from Iowa where Christian surgeons had restored his sight.

Pedro and Martine had stayed with Mrs. Gohman during one stop on the 1,500-mile journey from Las Truchas, Mexico, to Iowa, and they visited again on the return.

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Priscilla, who had constantly witnessed to the Gomez and Madriles families, shepherded them to Trinity Baptist Church where they attended two Sunday services preached by her pastor, David Rodriguez.

Martine's father and Javier's aunt both accepted Christ at the evening service.

About the size of a four-year-old, Maria Garcia suffered from a brain cyst, which had caused her father to pass her off as a "demoniac."

A Baptist physician from Dallas first diagnosed her illness while spending his vacation working in one of four mobile medical clinics operated by the Texas Baptist River Ministry. The clinic, a refurbished school bus, had been outfitted and donated by First Baptist Church, Dallas.

Maria's expenses to El Paso were covered by Harold Scarbrough, El Paso Associational missionary; the Baptist physician and Jim Hill, pastor of First Baptist Church, Fabens, Tex., across the Rio Grande from Maria's home in Guadalupe del Bravo, Mexico.

Although doubtful they could prolong her life, doctors in El Paso operated and removed the cyst.

Within five days, Maria had died, leaving a \$1,100 medical bill which the hospital wrote off as charity.

"I was the first one to see Maria's mother after her death," Priscilla says. "She was distressed and upset, and I talked to her for about an hour."

"What helped her the most," Priscilla says, "was a prayer led by my pastor, David Rodriguez, and the presence of Jim Hill. Jim could speak no Spanish and she could speak no English, but she clung to him for a type of reassurance not communicated by words."

The efforts of Texas Baptists, including coordination by the Rio Grande River Ministry, has opened wide an opportunity to minister to physical and spiritual needs of Maria's mother and her 10 remaining children.

Maria Rayita Garcia died. But her death softened the hearts of those she loved and opened their eyes to those who would shed a "rayita"--little ray of sunshine--through Christ on those she left behind.

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Liberian President's Relative
Pastors Small Tennessee Church

by W. A. Reed

NASHVILLE (BP)--The brother-in-law of the new president of Liberia is pastor of a Baptist church in Tullahoma, Tenn., and works as a nurses' aide at Hubbard Hospital here.

He is Eric David, a May graduate of American Baptist Theological Seminary, a school operated here jointly by the Southern Baptist Convention and National Convention, USA, Inc. He plans to enter Vanderbilt Divinity School here and pursue a master of divinity degree.

David's brother-in-law is William R. Tolbert, newly-installed president of the Republic of Liberia and the immediate past president of the Baptist World Alliance. Tolbert became president of the African nation following the death of President V. S. Tubman.

Mrs. David, in an interview with the Nashville Tennessean, said that "our life has been that of the average couple on a college campus.

"We don't want to impress people that we are so high," she said modestly. "We are just ordinary people."

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Although she stressed that they have not tried to use the fact that her brother-in-law is a high-ranking African official for personal gain, Mrs. David acknowledged that being in the president's family has advantages.

"You can get in and out of the country when you wish with visas, and perhaps there are other advantages," she said.

She added that she and her husband met in Monrovia, Liberia, but were married in Nashville.

At the time of their wedding about three years ago, members of First Baptist Church here gave them a shower. One of the church members who met Mrs. David there described her as "a charming, attractive lady."

David, tall and light-skinned, was described as having the appearance of an African prince.

Tolbert, who was vice president of Liberia for 20 years (since 1951), is now in the presidential palace, reportedly a \$6 million structure.

In contrast, the David's home is typically American. It is an un-numbered cottage on the campus of American Baptist Theological Seminary overlooking the Cumberland River here. Mrs. David stressed that they did not want people to think they were wealthy, but were just average people.

American Baptist Seminary students and some of the seminary's top officials did not know that the Davids are related to an African president, and are the equivalent of royalty.

David's sister, the former Victoria A. David, is the wife of the new Liberian president. Mrs. Tolbert and David are the son and daughter of a distinguished Liberian jurist.

Ironically, David was working in the emergency room of Hubbard Hospital as an orderly when Meharry Medical College, a Negro institution connected with Hubbard Hospital, signed an agreement to help train Liberian and other African physicians. Meharry officials did not know David was the brother-in-law of the Liberian leader.

Five other Nashville colleges are participating with Meharry in the five-year program set up by the U. S. State Department's Agency for International Development (AID) Bureau of Africa. The program is designed to develop and strengthen mother-child health services in Africa, and will be directed by Dr. James Carter of Meharry.

In addition to his work at Hubbard Hospital, David preaches at the Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Tullahoma, Tenn., about 65 miles southeast of Nashville.

Tolbert also is a Baptist pastor. Since his ordination at age 40, Tolbert has been pastor of the Zion Praise Baptist Church in Bensonville, Liberia, and Mount Sinai Baptist Church in the Todee District of Liberia.

Tolbert is also president of the Liberian Baptist Missionary and Education Convention, and was president of the 31-million member Baptist World Alliance from 1965-70. Mrs. Tolbert is president of the Baptist women's work in Liberia.

Tolbert was in Nashville in July of 1967 for the Baptist World Alliance Executive Committee meeting, about a year before the Davids moved to Nashville to attend American Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Baptist College to Award
Scholarships to RA Aides

7/30/71

HOUSTON (BP)--Houston Baptist College here will award scholarships to Texas Royal Ambassadors who have excelled in the Royal Ambassador service aid program, and a college official has urged other Southern Baptist colleges to consider awarding similar scholarships.

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Troy Womack, vice president for financial affairs at the Baptist school, said \$600 per year will go to the top Royal Ambassador selected each year by Texas Baptist Men, Brotherhood (laymen's) affiliate of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Over a four-year period, each recipient would receive \$2,400.

In addition, \$300 per year (\$1,200 total) will go to each other Royal Ambassador who has completed as many as five service aid awards and is selected by Texas Baptist Men for the scholarships.

"A boy who excels in the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's RA (Royal Ambassador) service aid program is the...kind of young man we pay money to get," Womack said. "It takes initiative and ability to excel in the program."

Womack added that other Southern Baptist colleges and universities would do well to consider a similar scholarship program for Royal Ambassadors who excel in the service aid program. "After all," he said, "we all want the top notch students."

The service aid program is part of the advancement plan for 15 to 17-year-old Royal Ambassadors (a Southern Baptist mission education organization for boys). A service aid award is given for each 150 hours of service a Royal Ambassador completes in one of five church functions--worship, witness, ministry, education and application.

The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, Memphis, gives national recognition to Royal Ambassadors receiving five service aid awards. Three boys were recognized this year at the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis--one from Illinois and two from Texas.

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Baylor Medical To Get State Aid, Lower Tuition

HOUSTON (BP)--Baylor College of Medicine here, which was cut loose from the Baptist General Convention of Texas in late 1969, expects to sign a contract with the Coordinating Board of the Texas College and University System by early September.

Trustees of the medical school have voted to cut tuition for Texas residents from \$2,000 to \$400 a year, the same tuition now paid by Texas residents at other state medical schools. The change will go into effect when the contract is signed.

The lower charge will allow Baylor to double its student body and boost the state's supply of physicians.

Enabling legislation was passed to allow Baylor's acceptance by the state not long after Texas Baptists released the school. Voting of stipends for students bogged down until the recently completed session of the Texas legislature.

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