



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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October 11, 1971

**SBC President Urges Defeat
Of Prayer Amendment**

By Carl Bates, President
Southern Baptist Convention

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Our Baptist forefathers fought and many of them suffered for the cause of religious freedom. Baptists made a significant contribution to freedom from governmental tyranny by helping to get the First Amendment incorporated into the nation's Constitution.

Now we see not only separation of church and state being attacked, but we see the free exercise of religion itself about to be breached.

Specifically I refer to the proposed constitutional "non-denominational prayer amendment" that probably will be voted on by the House of Representatives in Washington on November 8.

I have read this amendment carefully and have studied the decisions of the Supreme Court concerning prayer and Bible reading in public schools. It is my deliberate opinion that the Supreme Court gave voluntary religion a tremendous boost by removing governmental authority from the devotional life of school children.

It is my further opinion that the proposed prayer amendment (House Joint Resolution 191) is one of the most insidious developments against freedom and true religion that I have seen.

What is a "non-denominational" prayer, anyway? Does this mean that one could not pray in Jesus' name in any public building? Baptists, Catholics, Unitarians, Jews, Buddhists, and dozens of other groups do not agree on the nature and form of prayer. It hardly seems likely that the legislature and the courts could solve this centuries-old debate and define "non-denominational prayer" to everyone's satisfaction.

Even if they could devise a prayer that would be absolutely non-sectarian, then the bill before Congress would require and make mandatory this kind of prayer in public buildings. That hardly seems to be "voluntary" prayer. The bill before the House of Representatives is a contradiction in several directions and it should be defeated.

The Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in St. Louis in June, took a strong position against any change in the First Amendment and in favor of the voluntary nature of religion.

I urgently request that every Southern Baptist do all in his power to exercise the stewardship of his Christian influence by urging his congressman to vote against the "non-denominational prayer amendment." Assure him that a vote against the amendment is not a vote against God or against prayer, but it is a vote for freedom and true religion.

Now is the time to stand up and be counted for freedom. Don't be deceived by an innocent-sounding constitutional amendment that is in reality a "booby-trap" and a time-bomb against true religion.

Believe me, the fight against the "non-denominational prayer amendment" is a fight against regimented and governmentally sponsored religion. Real prayer and genuine New Testament religion have nothing to gain and all to lose if this amendment becomes a part of the Constitution.

Here is what you can do. Write, phone or telegraph your representative in Congress and insist that he do all in his power to defeat H. J. Res. 191, which is the "non-denominational prayer amendment."

Call your congressman's home office and see if he is going to be there anytime soon. Make an appointment with him and tell him your views face to face. If you can't do this, write or telegraph him at the House Office Building in Washington, D. C.

You can call him on the phone at this number - (202) 224-3121 - which is the number of the United States Capitol Building.

Whatever you do must be done before November 8, when the crucial vote may be taken.

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J. Norris Palmer, 73,
Dies of Heart Attack

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BATON ROUGE, La. (BP)--J. Norris Palmer, pastor of First Baptist Church of Baton Rouge for 37 years, died of a sudden heart attack here Oct. 9. He was 73.

Palmer, long active in denominational life as a member of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, seemed in good health until the time of his death, associates said.

Funeral services were held Monday, Oct. 11, at the First Baptist Church. Robert Lee, executive secretary of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, and several other local and state Baptist leaders, officiated.

Palmer had been president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, a member of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, chairman of the SBC promotion committee, and chairman of the SBC committee on order of business for several years.

A graduate of Mississippi College, Clinton, Miss., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, he had been pastor of churches in Mansfield, La., Memphis, Tenn., and Hollandale, Miss., before coming to the Baton Rouge church in 1933.

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Allerton Named Professor
At Southern Baptist Seminary

10/11/71 130

LOUISVILLE (BP)--Thomas D. Allerton, minister of education at First Baptist Church in Atlanta, has been appointed assistant professor of religious education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here.

He will join the Louisville faculty Jan. 1, 1972, but will not begin teaching here until the fall semester because he will be engaged in doctoral studies.

In accepting his resignation effective Jan. 1, the Atlanta church granted him two days off each week until then to pursue a doctorate in education at the University of Georgia. He will become a full-time graduate student there Jan. 1.

Ernest J. Loessner, Dean of the School of Religious Education at Southern, said Allerton will teach in the areas of educational administration and adult education. He will also supervise field education for students in the religious school.

Previously Allerton served as minister of education at First Baptist Church, Athens, Tenn., Warrington Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla., and Miami Shores Baptist Church in Miami, Fla. He is a graduate of Stetson University in Florida and Southern Seminary.

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