



BAPTIST PRESS

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Baptists Call For Return
To Morality in Public Life

WB

WASHINGTON (BP)--"All public officials must be subject to law in both public and private conduct," declared top executives and lay leaders of seven national Baptist bodies in "A Statement of Concern" adopted during the meeting here of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

"Believing that separation of church and state does not mean separation of religion from government or politics, nor should it imply the divorce of religion's basic moral and ethical principles from the conduct of public affairs, we voice our concern over some recent developments in public life and reaffirm our commitment to the fundamental principles of democracy."

"The Baptist leaders adopted the statement in response to a challenge from the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, James E. Wood Jr., in his address to the opening session of the committee.

"At the moment we are in the dark ages of public affairs in America," Wood observed after referring to the "unprecedented American tragedy. . . largely made public as a result of the so-called 'Watergate Affair.'"

Wood continued: "There has been the attempted prostitution of government power to manipulate the electoral process and to justify lying, illegal spying and criminal lawlessness on the part of high ranking members of the administration and federal government agencies in the name of national security. . .

"Dangerous assaults have been made on constitutional liberties, often by those who, at the same time they eschew constitutional liberties, mouth 'law and order' for the citizenry at large," Wood charged.

In a motion asking the committee to express the need for high moral and ethical values at every level of our national life, Theodore Adams noted that the public affairs committee could not meet in the nation's capital without speaking to this matter. Adams, a past president of the Baptist World Alliance, is pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Richmond, Va., and a current visiting professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N. C.

The statement endorsed by the committee mentioned the "widespread distrust of government resulting from the abuse of political power." The Baptist leaders noted with gratitude that there is a widespread reaction against this abuse and that such reaction evidences the intrinsic strength of the American tradition.

"The times call for an affirmation of trust in the basic principles of the American system of democracy," the statement read. "These include:

- "1. Government's powers are derived from the consent of the governed;
- "2. The harmful potential in any concentration of governmental power makes necessary the distribution of powers among those who make, execute and interpret law;
- "3. Government is to protect the rights and liberties and to promote the well-being of all people; and
- "4. All public officials must be subject to law in both public and private conduct."

In affirming these principles, the committee statement concluded, "We express our

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faith in the ultimate triumph of the right and of the truth in a nation whose citizens are dedicated to justice and righteousness in every aspect of life."

The statement further urged the people "to require character and integrity in both public and private life and to discharge responsibly their duties as citizens."

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Agency Acts On Civil
Rights, Religion, Prayer

WB

10/5/73

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in its semiannual meeting here gave major attention to religion in schools, civil rights for all people and proposed constitutional prayer amendments.

In an address on religion and public education, James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, declared, "The purely secular view of education, which ignores the role of religion in the life of man, is neither academically tenable nor historically defensible, no matter what one's personal views toward religion may be."

He reviewed historic Supreme Court decisions related to religion in schools together with the development of the National Council on Religion and Public Education (NCRPE). The NCRPE is a coalition of organizations for including religion in public school curriculum in accordance with the Supreme Court guidelines.

Wood hailed the work of NCRPE, the American Association of School Administrators, programs developed by a number of universities and efforts by religious organizations for the inclusion of religion in the curriculum of schools.

So optimistic was the Baptist leader toward these developments that he declared, "Clearly, we are on the threshold of a new day in American public education."

Wood continued, "Recognition of the rightful role of religion in public education, long overdue, is being increasingly recognized by educators and the citizenry alike.

"The academic study of religion presages for the future a new dimension in the educational experiences of American youth enrolled in the public schools and provides, at the same time, acknowledgement at long last that the study of religion is essential to the integrity of public education."

In other developments, the Baptist Joint Committee stood firm in its opposition to proposed Constitutional prayer amendments advocated by some members of Congress. The committee has adamantly opposed governmentally written prayers and school board sponsored religious devotions.

The Baptist Joint Committee takes the position that unless prayer and religious devotion are voluntary, it is neither genuine prayer nor true devotion. For this reason the committee has insisted that the religious life and indoctrination of school children be kept out of the hands of public agencies and retained by the homes and churches of the nation.

A number of proposed constitutional prayer amendments have been introduced both in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The Senate subcommittee on constitutional amendments has held two days of hearings on seven proposals before the Senate. Only advocates of these amendments have been heard thus far.

If and when the hearings continue, the Baptist Joint Committee will be among the leading religious bodies in the nation to oppose these proposed prayer amendments.

The United States Catholic Conference, the action agency of the Catholic bishops, has announced that it intends to seek not only a Constitutional prayer amendment but also an amendment that will overthrow all the Supreme Court decisions banning religious instruction and indoctrination in the public schools.

John W. Baker, associate director in charge of research services for the Baptist Joint Committee, chairs an ad hoc coalition of religious and civil liberties organizations in

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Washington to oppose all such proposed changes in the U.S. Constitution relating to religion.

In the area of civil rights for all people, the Baptist Joint Committee instructed its staff to continue working with such groups as the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights whenever the concerns of the leadership conference and the concerns of the Baptist Joint Committee are the same.

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights is a voluntary, nonpartisan association of more than 120 national civil rights, religious, labor, civic, professional and fraternal organizations seeking to advance civil rights for all Americans through government action.

While some of the Baptist bodies that sponsor the Baptist Joint Committee are members of the leadership conference, others are not. The Baptist Joint Committee itself is not a member, although many times the interests of both bodies overlap.

In other actions, the Baptist Joint Committee re-elected its officers for another year, paid tribute to its first executive director, J. M. Dawson, who died in July, and took steps to include young people as visitors in the March meeting of the committee.