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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Court School Aid Decision
Both Approved and Deplored

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Baptist official here has joined others in praising the U. S. Supreme Court decision in the Ohio parochial school aid case (Wolman v. Walters, June 24, 1977).

But opinion is divided in reaction to the decision, with others, including the Southern Baptist Convention president, reacting negatively.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs here, said that in the Wolman decision "the Supreme Court has again reaffirmed that public funds may not be used to support church schools.

"Any claim that the court has in effect paved the way for the use of public funds for church schools clearly ignores the substance of the court's decision and its rationale," Wood declared.

The Baptist executive pointed out that the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs for 30 years has participated in briefs to the U. S. Supreme Court in opposition to the use of tax funds for the support of parochial schools, as it did in the Wolman case.

In these briefs, Wood continued, the Baptist Joint Committee expressed its "long and consistent commitment to the guarantees of the First Amendment respecting religious liberty and the separation of church and state, public control with expenditure of public funds, and the uniquely public function of American public schools."

In Wolman, the U. S. Supreme Court upheld parts of an Ohio state law and declared as unconstitutional other parts. It upheld parts that allocated public funds for the benefit of children in parochial schools, but which funds, in the view of the court, did not contribute to the educational programs of the schools. Declared unconstitutional were those parts of the law that, in the view of the court, went beyond aid to children and gave aid to the schools as such.

Upheld were those parts of the Ohio law that authorized the state to provide nonpublic school pupils with books, standardized testing and scoring, diagnostic services, and therapeutic and remedial services. The books are to be secular, state-approved books, and the services are for the most part to be performed by public employees at sites clearly identified as public premises.

Declared unconstitutional were those portions of the Ohio law that provided instructional materials and equipment and field trip services that were, in the view of the court, integral to the educational program of the schools.

Reaction to the court's decision, within the court itself and from sources outside the court have been both favorable and unfavorable.

The court opinion was read by Justice Harry A. Blackmun. It declared that "in order to pass constitutional muster under the establishment clause a statute (1) must have a secular legislative purpose; (2) must have a principal or primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion."

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The majority opinion of the court said, "We have acknowledged before, and we do so again here, that the wall of separation that must be maintained between church and state is a blurred, indistinct, and variable barrier depending on all the circumstances of a particular relationship."

In 1968, in *Board of Education v. Allen*, the Supreme Court upheld state loan of textbooks to private school pupils under certain circumstances.

Dissenting with the current court decision, Justice Thurgood Marshall said, "I am now convinced that (the) *Allen* (decision) is largely responsible for reducing the 'high and impregnable' wall between church and state erected by the First Amendment to a 'blurred, indistinct, and variable barrier' incapable of performing its vital functions of protecting both church and state."

Also dissenting in the *Wolman* case, Justice William J. Brennan attacked the Ohio law by saying that "ingenuity in draftsmanship cannot obscure the fact that this subsidy to sectarian schools amounts to \$88,000,000." He also expressed the view that the Ohio program presents "a divisive political potential of unusual magnitude."

Joining those who approved the *Wolman* decision was Andrew Leigh Gunn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He said that the decision represents another major victory for the cause of church-state separation. "There has been no fundamental departure from the principle that religious education may not be supported by tax funds," he said. "The court is still firm and the wall of separation between church and state remains," he added.

In a similar vein, Leo Pfeffer, noted church-state constitutional lawyer, said that "the court has re-emphasized its adherence to the basic principle that tax-raised funds may not be used to finance educational services in religious schools."

However, Pfeffer warned, "It can be expected that parochial school authorities and legislators opposed to the constitutional prohibition of aid to religious schools will continue their efforts to find other means to evade the constitutional prohibition."

Jimmy Allen, newly elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention and former national president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, reacted negatively to the *Wolman* decision. He charged that the court "relaxed its tension toward a consistent application of the principal of separation of church and state," that the decision will result in "excessive entanglement" between government and religion, and that the public schools are the real victims by draining off public funds for nonpublic school education.

Allan Reitman, associate director of the American Civil Liberties Union, was "distressed by the decision." He said that the Supreme Court is trying "to slice too finely" and that "any form of aid to parochial schools is a violation of the constitution."

The *Washington Post*, which has long championed the cause of separation of church and state, in an editorial deplored the *Wolman* decision of the Supreme Court. It charged the court of following a "meandering course" in recent years "in trying to decide what kinds of aid to sectarian schools are permissible."

The *Post* said that the decision "encourages those who favor state aid to sectarian schools to try to find new ways to get money to them." It concluded, "for the time being, then, the door is open fairly wide to state and federal aid to sectarian schools, limited only by the ingenuity of lawmakers to devise new ways to skip over what's left of that 'wall of separation.'"

Catholic commentators were both pleased and displeased with the decision. They praised the court for approving the auxiliary services provided by the Ohio law, but they condemned the court for not approving public payment for parochial school field trips and for certain instructional materials.

Representing the Catholic viewpoint were John Meyers, president of the National Catholic Education Association, and Patrick Farrell, United States Catholic Conference representative for Catholic schools.

Meyers criticized the use of the term "private" in reference to parochial schools. More correctly, he said, they should be called "public-nongovernmental" schools.

Cooperative Program
Running 9.87% Ahead

NASHVILLE (BP)--Through nine months of the 1976-77 fiscal year, giving to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national Cooperative Program unified budget is running 9.87 percent ahead of the same point last year.

The undesignated Cooperative Program funds tally \$38,594,179 through June 30, compared to \$35,127,028 at the same point last year, while total gifts, including \$40,132,459 in designated gifts, have reached the \$78,726,637 mark. Total gifts, which exceed last year's figure by \$6,191,863, are 8.54 percent ahead.

Cooperative Program receipts have continued on an upswing since they slipped to 8.94 percent ahead of last year at the seven-month mark, after registering a 10.07 increase at the six-month point. After eight months, the undesignated receipts to fund the SBC's worldwide missions program stood at 9.59 percent ahead of the same point last year.

In June, Southern Baptist state conventions forwarded \$4,085,024 in Cooperative Program receipts for use in worldwide causes--12.31 percent ahead of the \$3,637,350 given in June of 1976.

Total receipts for June, including the undesignated Cooperative Program funds, and another \$3,463,131 in designated receipts, tallied \$7,548,155--some 7.85 percent ahead of total contributions last June.

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College Officials Deny
Pastor's Statements

Baptist Press
7/5/77

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (BP)--Officials of William Carey College here have categorically denied quotations from a Texas pastor about the college in a story written following the presentation of a motion before the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) by the pastor in June.

Dick Onarecker, pastor of Oak Forest Baptist Church, Houston, made a motion, adopted by messengers, that colleges and schools which bear the name Southern Baptist be encouraged to adopt a statement of purpose reflecting three points about how the Bible is viewed and the beliefs of faculty members.

In an interview afterward, Onarecker, a former Mississippi pastor and graduate of William Carey, declared that a "Zeus Ball" had been held on the William Carey campus and described it as a student activity involving what he termed homage to a "false god."

He also said the William Carey administration should be urged to stop allowing the sale or use of tobacco and "alcoholic or intoxicating substances" on institution campuses or property.

He indicated he would ask a Mississippi pastor to make a motion at the next annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, involving the content of his motion to the SBC and his additional allegations in the SBC newsroom interview about William Carey.

Bruce Aultman, a Hattiesburg lawyer and William Carey trustee chairman, and Ralph Noonkester, William Carey president, deny Onarecker's statements about the college.

"It is not so," Aultman told Mississippi's Baptist Record in commenting on the charge that the "Zeus Ball" is a student activity involving homage to a false god.

Noonkester, in an interview with the Baptist Record, explained that there is such a civic function carried on in the city. It begins with a dinner at the country club, he said. Following the dinner the participants go to a building on the campus where a cultural event, a theatrical musical, is staged, he added. "This is a community affair, and no students participate," Noonkester said, noting that admission is by ticket only.

"The theatrical production is beautifully done," the president declared. He added that there is no obligation to allow the musical to be staged on the campus but that the college has allowed community productions to be held in the building as an expression of appreciation to the community for its support.

Following the musical the group returns to the country club for its ball, he said.

In addition he said that the accusations implied in Onarecker's statement about college faculty members are totally unwarranted as far as William Carey is concerned.

Both Aultman and Noonkester denied in the Baptist Record interview that alcohol or "any intoxicating substances" are sold on the campus, either in connection with the musical or otherwise. "Those coming on campus for the musical understand there is to be no use of alcohol," Noonkester said.

"We have nothing to run from at all," Aultman said. Noonkester pointed out that the college once had a program for servicemen called "Bootstrappers," and a cigaret machine was installed in a snack room at their request. There was a great deal of opposition to that, however,

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he said; and "it is long since gone."

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Avoid Distortion of Religious
Experience, Pastor Urges

Baptist Press
7/5/77

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--The religious experiences of many people today are actually "higher forms of escapism" or even "exercises in narcissism"--self love--a Southern Baptist pastor declared here.

C. David Matthews, pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S. C., told a conference at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center that "when given priority, our religious experiences can become quite unChristian, even instruments of Satan. Our pre-occupation with spiritual experience may be ingeniously demonic, a vintage work of Anti-Christ," he said.

Matthews spoke on "World Decision Making and Our Calling" in the first of five nightly addresses at the Christian Life Commission conference, sponsored annually by the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

In addition to being a false form of security, Matthews said that a so-called Christian experience "can feed our narcissism and develop in us a sense of self-righteousness. In other words, one's love from one's experience can be a subtle form of loving oneself," he said.

"Some of the most self-righteous exhibitions I have ever seen or given," he said, "have been when someone was talking about his experiences with God."

In reference to religious experiences that are forms of escapism, Matthews commented that "Christ will lead us to heaven in good time, but in the meantime we must live in the real world in which he was incarnate. The way of the cross never has been and never can be a flight from reality," he said.

Matthews went on to stress, however, that "the people of Jesus Christ are intended to have experiences with God. I believe we are meant to know peak experiences that fill our living with divine richness," he explained.

Misunderstandings have arisen, he said, because people have "twisted the context of Christian calling in the direction of our assumption that God's principle concern is to provide individuals with the happiness they so selfishly seek."

Matthews said Christians many times envy such Biblical characters as Moses, Isaiah, and Paul "largely because we have identified their calling with our lust for experience."

Church leaders, he added, are often guilty of taking advantage of this yearning for dramatic spiritual experiences.

"In many of our Baptist churches," Matthews said, "the leadership knows, whether they admit it even to themselves or not, that the only way people can be moved to do anything is to base appeals to this pathetic craving for experience."

"In many of our Baptist churches, pastors succeed only through promising and pushing through highly questionable opiate of religious experience," he said. "And the quantitative success of many of these churches may be more an evidence of a deep cultural sickness than a testimony to the validity of the gospel," he said.

Although he believes the nation and its churches are filled with people who are searching for some type of dynamic spiritual experience, Matthews said that perhaps the Christian experience or calling cannot be had by simply wanting it or "doing certain things to make it happen."

"The calling of God, Biblically, is not so much the occasion of the ecstatic experience as it is the occasion of moral demands," Matthews explained. "God's calling to persons in history never had spiritual experience as a goal and end in itself. He calls us into a way, into a work, into a responsibility. He calls us to a task that will get out idolatrous minds off our central nervous system," he declared.

"When the Christian sense of calling is separate from the Christian concern of moral decision making, we all either become gnostics who we cannot redeem the world because we have already left it or we become semi-Biblical humanists whose God becomes theoretical and whose vision fades."

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