



BAPTIST PRESS

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WB

82-35

BJCPA Issues Warnings On
School Prayer, Convention

By Stan Haste and Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--Members of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs--representing eight Baptist groups--issued warnings against proposals in Congress on prayer in public schools and a nationwide movement calling for a constitutional convention.

Meeting here for the annual session, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs also heard warnings from a Jesuit priest who formerly served in Congress about numerous Reagan administration domestic and international policies.

In other business conducted during a two-day meeting, the BJCPA adopted criteria for its involvement in legal disputes, approved a record 1982-83 budget and reelected all current officers.

In a strongly-worded document on prayer in public schools designed to provide its staff with a fresh statement for use in this year's congressional battle on the subject, the Baptist agency reaffirmed its support of what it called the "historic" 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions banning state-mandated prayer and Bible reading in public schools.

Speaking to proposals in Congress for a constitutional amendment to nullify those decisions and for stripping federal courts of jurisdiction to hear challenges to state and local laws returning prayer to public schools, the group pledged to work for their defeat. The statement also promised that the Washington-based Baptist committee will "exercise a leadership role" in seeking defeat of both kinds of legislation.

In its statement on the call for a constitutional convention, the Baptist Joint Committee warned that 31 state legislatures have called for such a convention for various reasons, including the desire to pass constitutional amendments requiring a balanced federal budget and banning abortion. Two thirds, or 34 states must issue calls for a constitutional convention before Congress is required to convene it.

The Baptist statement warned that such a gathering "easily could become a 'runaway' body which could propose alterations to the entire constitution" and urged Congress to establish rules of procedure to limit the subject matter which a constitutional convention would consider.

Another statement, expressing renewed commitment to racial justice and affirmative action in employment practices in both churches and society, was tabled after lengthy debate. The proposal was introduced in an effort to demonstrate opposition to racism and sexism in the aftermath of the agency's support for Bob Jones University in a widely publicized Supreme Court test.

That support, based on the agency's belief that the Internal Revenue Service acted illegally and unconstitutionally in stripping the Greenville, S.C. school of its tax exemption, is spelled out in a friend-of-the-court brief filed last fall in the now-famous case.

The action to table came on a 12-9 vote after members were unable to agree if the Baptist Joint Committee had authority to call on denominational bodies and churches to examine and alter employment practices.

Former Massachusetts Congressman Robert F. Drinan blasted the Reagan administration policy of cutting federal programs which aid the poor while simultaneously promoting large military spending increases. Drinan, who now heads Americans for Democratic Action, expressed fear "for what is transpiring in El Salvador" and indicated the administration's focus on the "alleged east-west confrontation" diverts attention from what he considers the "real problems" in the world such as hunger, inadequate health care and the population explosion.

He further warned against pending legislation threatening religious liberty and other freedoms guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Expressing concern about pending bills which would "prohibit federal courts from even hearing cases on prayer, abortion and busing," Drinan charged that congressional sponsors "recognize that they can't kill the message and therefore they want to cripple the messenger."

Drinan indicated that a tuition tax credit bill might clear the Senate if the White House orchestrates it but added that the projected large budget deficits are working against such passage. He scored Reagan for being the "first president in American history to endorse full support for private schools" and for having the "first administration in 50 years to oppose enforcement of civil rights laws."

In other action, the Baptist Joint Committee adopted a set of criteria to guide the agency in future legal actions in "friend-of-the-court briefs."

The agency's Washington staff will continue to determine which cases to enter. If "serious doubt" exists about whether a case falls within the program assignment of the agency, the organization's officers will decide.

Committee members also adopted a record 1982-83 budget of \$431,916 and reelected all four current officers to new one-year terms. Reelected as chairperson was Elizabeth J. Miller, an official of the Board of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. First and second vice chairpersons are C.J. Malloy Jr., general secretary, progressive National Baptist Convention, and John Binder, executive secretary, North American Baptist Conference. Serving a second term as secretary is R.G. Puckett, executive director, Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

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RB

Journeyman, Children Narrowly
Escape As Church Roof Collapses

Baptist Press
3/4/82

TAMANDUA, Brazil (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary journeyman Mark Hershey and about 30 Brazilian children narrowly escaped tragedy when the heavy tile roof of a Brazilian Baptist church collapsed.

The 24-year-old Kansan had just left the church, where he both lived and worked, to spend an evening with friends when he heard a booming crash. He turned to find that the tile roof of the church had collapsed, crumpling the side wall and smashing most of the benches inside. One roof tile lay imbedded in the pulpit like an ax.

Only minutes before, more than 30 children had left the building, which doubles as a school and clinic for Tamandua, an agricultural community in the northern Brazilian state of Pernambuco.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has released \$3,000 in disaster relief funds for reconstruction of the church, to be coordinated by Hershey and missionaries Donald Turner and Glen Swicegood. Hershey came to Tamandua in 1981, assigned to mission construction and relief projects in the area.

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Texas Check Boosts
February CP Giving

CO

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)— A Texas-sized boost from Southern Baptists' largest state convention pushed February Cooperative Program receipts to \$8,933,611, the third highest month in history.

Texas, which surpassed its own Cooperative Program budget in 1981 by \$4.9 million, forwarded to the SBC Executive Committee an advance budget check for worldwide mission causes of \$1,825,603.

That "extra" check helped make undesignated February 1982 receipts 31.4 percent higher than February 1981. A similar, though smaller, check from Texas in 1981 was counted in the January 1981 receipts, which skewed figures for this January—an increase of only .37 percent over 1981—and contributed to the apparently huge February increase.

The more critical year-to-date figures show Southern Baptists have contributed \$38,988,450 for missions and education through the national Cooperative Program, a figure 13.2 percent ahead of the same five months last year.

Designated receipts for February, primarily for the Lottie Moon Christmas offering for foreign missions, are down over February 1981, due in part to the arrival of \$2 million after books had closed Feb. 26, the last working day of the month.

February designated receipts, following a strong increase the previous month, totaled \$22,859,890, a decrease over February 1981 of 3.6 percent.

Year-to-date designated receipts total \$36,843,508, an increase of 4.5 percent over the same period in 1981.

Total designated and undesignated giving was \$31,793,501 in February, an increase of 4.2 percent over February 1981. Year-to-date figures show total gifts of \$75,831,958, an increase of 8.8 percent over the first five months of 1981.

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Former Baptist and Reflector
Editor Dies at Georgia Home

CO

Baptist Press
3/4/82

STONE MOUNTAIN, Ga. (BP) --James A. Lester, public relations secretary for the Georgia Baptist Convention and former editor of the Tennessee Baptist newspaper, the Baptist and Reflector, died March 2 at his home in Stone Mountain, Ga., of a heart attack. He was 53.

Lester was on the staff of the New Orleans Times-Picayune newspaper before he became public relations secretary for the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1957, a position he held until becoming editor of the Baptist and Reflector in 1968.

Lester resigned as editor in 1973 and in 1974 he returned to the Georgia Baptist Convention office as public relations secretary and Baptist Center manager.

At the time of his death he was interim pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church and Protestant chaplain of the DeKalb County police department. He had been pastor of Baptist churches in Georgia and Louisiana.

He is survived by his wife, Lynn; four children; Earl, of Nashville, Tenn., Edwin, of Franklin, Tenn., and Brian and Jenna who live at home in Stone Mountain; one grandchild, his mother, one brother and two sisters.

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Christian and Public Education
Examined at Texas CLC Meeting

By Orville Scott

DB

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Scientific creationism, secular humanism, church-state issues and private versus public schools were examined during the annual workshop of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

A hard-hitting attack on scientific creationists was launched by Bob Patterson, professor of religion at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, who said scientific creationism is not only poor science but poor theology as well.

Patterson said scientific creationists falsely assume that Genesis is a textbook in science. Rather, said Patterson, Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are saying God is sovereign, transcendent and purposeful. "He is Lord of nature and above nature."

It is also saying that the world is real and orderly and essentially good as it came from the hands of the Creator, said Patterson, editor of the book, "Science, Faith and Revelation: An Approach to Christian Philosophy."

"If modern science points in any direction, it points in the direction of a Creator," Patterson said.

A heated debate resulted from different assessments of humanism by author and family life consultant Tim LaHaye of Los Angeles, and Frank Stagg, professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

LaHaye contended, "A false religion called secular humanism has taken over the public schools." He said the "religion" is based on atheism, and was introduced in the public schools by the so-called fathers of public education in the U.S.: Horace Mann, John Dewey and Robert Owens.

LaHaye said humanists believe that man is the measure of all things, independent from God and capable of solving his own problems,

Stagg, criticizing LaHaye's definition, said there are many degrees of humanists but all recognize the necessary worth and potential of man. He also took issue with LaHaye's portrayal of humanism as "anti-God, anti-moral and anti-American."

"I'm not a Christian because I'm a humanist. I'm a humanist because I'm a Christian," said Stagg.

William Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., and LaHaye, spoke in support of private schools.

Hull said private schools such as the one sponsored by the Shreveport church, provide healthy competition to cause public schools to be more innovative, but he warned that churches sponsoring private schools must be militant supporters of public school education.

LaHaye, family life lecturer and author of "Battle for the Mind" and other books, said he started a high school in Los Angeles because of his concern over secular humanism invading the public schools.

A stirring call for support of public education was issued by David Matthews, pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., who called on churches to preach the good news by committing themselves to the work of public education.

Referring to private schools, Matthews asked: "Can you say to an oppressed person you've already walled out, 'We're here to serve you?'"

Church historian Penrose St. Amant echoed Matthews when he noted: "Baptists are increasingly part of the middle class that is isolated from the poor. You can't start a church in a community when you won't send your children to school there."

St. Amant, former professor at several Southern Baptist seminaries and former president of Ruschlikon Baptist Theological Seminary in Switzerland, added that if we take the public schools for granted, we will lose them. "Let it be said of this generation that we saw the ills and cured them and saw the essential place of education and sustained it."

An 88-year-old black educator, Benjamin Mays of Atlanta, Ga., said the public schools are needed to bring blacks and whites together but that 28 years after the Supreme Court's desegregation decision, "we are still in turmoil" and "the vast majority of Americans believe in a segregated school system."

On separation of church and state, John Baker, general counsel and director of research for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D.C., blasted a bill by Republican Sen. Jesse Helms to remove school prayer issues from the jurisdiction of federal courts, saying the bill would seriously affect religious liberty far beyond the issue of school prayer.

He also urged Baptists not to support attempts to require the teaching of scientific creationism in the public schools no matter what they personally believe about the origins of the earth.

"They (supporters of the attempts) are asking the government to force that religious doctrine on a group of students under the force of law. Baptists cannot support such action and be true to their heritage," he said.

Paul Salmon, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators in Arlington, Va., said there is good news and bad news for American education. The good news is that back-to-basics teaching is resulting in higher scores on aptitude and basic skills tests, but the bad news is that teaching won't be able to compete unless salaries are tied to the market.

He warned that America's education system faces international competition, noting that Japan already has captured the automobile and optical industries and "we are in the process of losing the computer business to Japan."

He said Japanese children go to school 225 days a year, and "if we don't understand support of education is vital to our national interest, our style of life and standard of living can be lost without a shot being fired."

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US2 Missionary
Real 'Superman'

AB

Baptist Press
3/4/82

LACEY, Wash. (BP)— Tom Wilson bounded out of the stands at halftime during a St. Martin's College basketball game, dressed as Superman and followed by two cheerleaders, bearing a long sign which read: "Charlotte, I Love You. Will You Marry Me? Tom."

The message was for St. Martin's senior Charlotte Larrabee, a member of East Lakes Baptist Chapel in Lacey, a mission of First Baptist, Lacey. Wilson, a US2 missionary of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, waited at center court on bended knee with a bouquet of red roses for an answer.

As the public address announcer read the message, Charlotte hustled to greet her beau with an acceptance kiss, after which Wilson scooped her into his arms and carried her off into the night!

But unlike the elusive comic strip character who can leap tall buildings in a single bound as well as the marriage altar, Wilson and Larrabee have set May 22 as the date for their wedding.

Now, if Lois Lane could just figure out how to do that....

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