



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
480 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Craig Bird, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Haste, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

July 20, 1983

83-108

Revised Prayer Amendment

'Best We've Got,' Draper Says

By Craig Bird

EULESS, Texas (BP)--Because "we've got to get some relief on the prayer issue," James T. Draper Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Convention, has endorsed President Ronald Reagan's proposed constitutional amendment on prayer in public schools, as revised.

"I'm not a constitutional lawyer, but I am satisfied with the language of it," Draper told Baptist Press July 19. "I don't know if it answers all the questions or not--but for me it is fine and I support it."

Reagan's amendment, which read, "Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to prohibit individual or group prayer in public schools or other public institutions. No person shall be required by the United States or by any State to participate in prayer," was revised July 12 to include a final line: "Nor shall the United States or any State compose the words of any prayer to be said in public schools."

Draper, who emphasized his support of the amendment was "personal" since no Southern Baptist, even the elected president of the 13.9-million member denomination, is empowered to speak for all Southern Baptists, maintained, "I still think the best way would be for the Supreme Court to get honest and say 'you guys are messing up what we said."

"In 1962 we said you can't prescribe prayer but we didn't say you can't pray in school"--then it (the battle over prayer in public schools) would be over and we wouldn't have to go through all this."

However, since "they apparently aren't going to do that" Draper is hopeful, "the pressure of the possibility of an amendment could force a judicial clarification" by the Supreme Court. "I hope it (the passing of the amendment) is not necessary, but it is the best tool we have right now and I do support it."

Draper had publicly insisted he could not support any prayer amendment which failed to guarantee no agent of the state would compose the prayers to be recited.

Draper said a July 13 Baptist Press story, which said he "stopped short" of endorsing the revised amendment, misinterpreted his stance. "I do endorse it, because I am satisfied agents of the state would be prohibited from composing and requiring the prayers," he said.

There have been different opinions of how limiting the last sentence of the proposed amendment would be. Draper feels it, "stipulates nobody--and my interpretation is no teacher, no school board, no principal, no official of the state--paid by public money, would be allowed to prescribe or require a certain type of prayer.

"People could pray out loud but no one could force other people to pray out loud."

The interpretation is shared by Jerry Falwell, president of Moral Majority. However, Robert Grant, chairman of Christian Voice, another major Religious Right organization, said he reads the proposal to say Congress and state legislatures would be prohibited from writing the prayers but local school boards would not.

John Baker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, an agency partially funded by the SBC, said the "new words contain legal loopholes which could lead to serious inroads into the principle of the separation of church and state."

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Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., who introduced the original version in May 1982, also introduced the revised amendment. The Senate Judiciary Committee voted to send it to the full Senate for a vote, along with another prayer amendment proposed by Sen. Orin Hatch, without recommending passage of either.

Draper, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas (a Dallas suburb), said he also supports legislation by Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., which would provide free access to public school facilities for student religious groups.

"Hatfield's proposal is very good and I have written him to encourage him and assure him of my support," Draper said. "But it deals only with free access and is not adequate for the prayer problem."

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Bus Pulling Contest
Injures Two Children

By Bob Matthews

Baptist Press
7/20/83

TULSA, Okla. (BP)--Two young boys were hospitalized with broken bones after being injured in a bus-pulling contest staged by Eastwood Church, Tulsa, on Sunday afternoon, July 17. Three to four hundred bus ministry children were divided into teams to pull more than 15 church buses with ropes across a 30-yard parking lot.

An Eastwood spokesman said the injured boys, ages 6 and 13, were listed in fair condition at St. John's Hospital and were expected to remain in the hospital 10 days to two weeks.

The spokesman, who declined to be identified, read a prepared statement from Ralph Speas, minister of education. It stated: "Adequate safety precautions were planned and carried out at the contest site. We took what we felt were required steps. Among those were the exclusion of pre-school age children and limiting the number of contestants on each rope.

"We did not expect the buses to be pulled as quickly as they were over the 30-yard course. Our people were standing by, but everything happened so quickly. We are very sorry that things happened the way they have, but we took every step we thought necessary to insure the safety for both contestants and those watching."

A newspaper story reported six-year old Brian Connor suffered a broken arm and shoulder and 13-year old Christopher Gruhn received a broken leg.

Barry Edwards, Eastwood director of buses, was quoted as saying a driver was in each bus ready to hit the brakes, an adult was in front of each bus to warn the driver of trouble and all youngsters had to be at least 10 feet from the buses.

"The kids started running into each other and before you knew it the accident happened," Edwards was quoted. Witnesses said one of the boys tripped and fell under the wheels of a moving bus.

The Eastwood spokesman said the winning bus-pullers had been promised ice cream sundaes from a nearby convenience store.

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Bill Would Formalize
U.S.-Vatican Relations

By Gerri Ratliff

Baptist Press
7/20/83

WASHINGTON (BP)--Legislation to establish U.S. diplomatic relations with the Vatican has been introduced by the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee along with 25 co-sponsors.

H.J.Res. 316, introduced by Clement J. Zablocki, D-Wis., would repeal part of an 1867 statute barring funds for a diplomatic representative to the pope. The Reagan administration has indicated its support for the bill, which would open the way for the president to establish formal ties at his discretion.

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A committee aide told Baptist Press action on the bill is "very unlikely" before the August congressional recess. So far no hearings have been scheduled.

In support of the legislation, Zablocki cited the Vatican as a valuable source of "vital information and diplomatic contact."

Since its inception in the 1930s, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has opposed both the appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican and the practice by six relatively recent presidents of sending personal representatives to the pope.

President Reagan's special envoy to the Vatican is former business executive and real estate developer William A. Wilson. A longtime friend of the president, Wilson was formerly head of Reagan's personnel advisory committee.

Five presidents prior to Reagan (Roosevelt, Truman, Nixon, Ford and Carter) have named personal representatives to the Vatican. In 1951 the BJCPA protested the practice as a "repudiation of the historic American principle of separation of church and state."

The American Baptist Bill of Rights, one of the founding documents of the BJCPA, opposes the "establishment of diplomatic relations with any ecclesiastical body" and deplors "the extension of special courtesies by our government to any ecclesiastical official."

Three Baptist conventions adopted the Bill of Rights in 1939--the Southern Baptist Convention, the Northern Baptist Convention (now American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.) and the National Baptist Convention.

According to BJCPA Executive Director James M. Dunn, formal U.S.-Vatican relations are opposed by the agency as an unconstitutional violation of the constitution's ban on an establishment of religion and an indication of preferential treatment not accorded any other church or religious body. In addition, the BJCPA feels the Roman Catholic Church itself would be damaged by diplomatic ties to the U.S.

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Baptist Leaders See Benefits
In Coordinated World Effort

Baptist Press
7/20/83

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--Baptist leaders from seven nations voiced strong support here for cooperative planning to develop an effective strategy for world evangelization.

At a special breakfast session held in connection with meetings of the Baptist World Alliance, dialogue was open and, in at least one instance, unusually candid.

R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and host for the session, traced how he had come to believe the time is ripe for joint planning. "If, and as, we sense the Lord's leadership, then let us join together, with everyone...an equal partner in world evangelization," he said.

Peter Leong, interim executive secretary of the Baptist Convention of Hong Kong, said he agreed totally with Parks' proposal. But he added he had known some missionaries who feel "we in Asia cannot do the Lord's work." He said his own experience and travel in Asia convinced him "we as Christians in Asia are not second class."

Parks replied: "There are no second class citizens in the Lord's work. If someone from among us has left that impression, I want to ask your forgiveness."

In April the Foreign Mission Board voted to invite fellow Baptists with whom it works overseas to join in planning world evangelization strategies. The meeting in Buenos Aires was the first of several sessions Parks hopes to hold to explore whether Baptist leaders want to join in such planning. Thirteen conventions or unions with which the board works already send missionaries to other countries.

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Azariah McKenzie, executive secretary-treasurer of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, said such planning should make it possible to avoid conflicts in responsibilities for outreach. "You have brought us this idea in God's time," he said. "God will bless it."

Parks told the 13 overseas leaders attending the Buenos Aires meeting he will write each of them to ask their response to the idea of cooperative planning and get their suggestions.

Knud Wumpelmann, Denmark, secretary-treasurer of the European Baptist Federation, said he sees such cooperation as being "imperative in the world we live in today." He said he knows many unions and conventions that are trying to decide where to send missionaries and he urged joint meetings next year in Berlin to get further input from all Baptists who would want to be involved.

Earlier, Sven Ohm, foreign missions secretary of the Swedish Baptist Union, asked Parks if others besides sister groups of the Southern Baptist work overseas could be consulted.

Parks said the Foreign Mission Board would have no authority to take initiative with all Baptists of the world. "At the same time, we pray the Spirit of the Lord may cause the idea to spread. I certainly would not want to try to contain such a movement of God's spirit."

To which Nilson Fanini, Brazilian evangelist and pastor of First Baptist Church, Niteroi, responded: "This openness is wonderful. It is a word needed today in the world and I am so happy to hear it from the Foreign Mission Board."

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Carter Advises Baptists On Placing Priorities

By Michael Tutterow

Baptist Press
7/20/83

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Susceptible to misplacing priorities, religious workers should look to Christ as the model for structuring relationships, a Birmingham, Ala., pastor feels.

Speaking at Home Missions Week at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, Charles T. Carter, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, told conference participants priorities are out of line "when things become more important than persons."

Citing the biblical account of Mary and Martha from the Gospel of Luke, Carter noted while Martha was doing "good things" for Jesus, her "doing" disrupted her relationships with Mary and Jesus. Likewise, workaholic religious leaders may erode their personal relationships.

"Christians always have been and always will be in the people business," Carter said. "But God has not called us to starve our families emotionally in the name of God's business." He added even in Southern Baptists' stands against sin, they should guard against devaluing individuals because of what they've done. "God forbid we ever lose sight of the fact that every person is important to God."

Carter also said Christians have misplaced their priorities when they "do the right things in the wrong spirit." He explained there was nothing wrong with the kinds of duties Martha was performing. But when she went unnoticed, she became "foul, accusatory toward her sister and argumentative with her Lord."

Carter added missions workers may feel ignored in remote missions points and accuse others of lack of concern and blame God for their loneliness. "A nasty spirit squelches motivation for missions," Carter said, "and it hurts those we love the most."

He also cautioned against mounting criticisms of Southern Baptist institutions by graduates of those institutions, and emphasized, "God forbid we would get so caught up in doing God's work that we become nasty to the very ones who nurtured us."

Citing Martha's concern for domestic chores over hearing Jesus, Carter asserted Christians have misplaced priorities "when doing good things becomes a substitute for doing the best things." He noted Southern Baptist emphases on training but cautioned against using it to keep people from entering into relationships with others.

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One of the problems among Southern Baptists is they receive training in evangelism but they don't know anyone with whom they can share their faith, said Carter. "It is much easier to plan (evangelism training programs) than to make time each week to personally share with someone," said Carter. "Our laypeople don't want someone to just tell them how to do it but someone who will stand with them and say 'I did witness.'"

But in sharing their faith, Carter warned against "preaching ourselves as Southern Baptists" and becoming "theological snobs" out of a zeal of the denomination. Instead he encouraged Baptists to identify with other Christian groups in spreading the gospel.

"There are some issues we'll never solve alone," he explained. "We need our brothers and sisters in Christ." Along with the acceptance of other denominations, Southern Baptists must become more accepting of other races, he said. "We need to say loudly that no one will ever be denied a hearing of the gospel of Jesus Christ because of the color of their skin. There is no second-class citizenship in the Lord."

Though denominational programs are important to Southern Baptist growth, Carter said, the church is to equip laypeople for ministry, "It's not the denomination that sets the church afire. It's the church that sets the denomination afire." While Southern Baptist agencies serve as equippers, "whatever Southern Baptists are today they owe to the local church."

The church must do its work in spite of conflict, in the midst of changes and in contact with "constancies," (stable doctrines) Carter said. "The church has always had problems based on opposition outside the church and imperfection inside," he explained. "Whenever you play the conscience of society, which is what the church ought to do, there will be conflict."

Conflict means changes, too, Carter said. "If we're to be anchored in the first century and relevant to this century then the church must be able to do it amid changes," he explained. That means pastors must give more attention to quality preaching, he added.

"Because of the knowledge explosion we dare not give anything but our very best to the preaching of the gospel," he said.

In addition to changes for the pastor, Carter noted societal changes will affect the church. One out of five families move today, said Carter, and the church "must reach out to those people in all their insecurities and say the Lord is the same."

Carter said the senior adult population is growing, with many retirees still healthy and "waiting to be challenged on the mission field." He also mentioned 50 percent of the population is single and Baptists "dare not say there is no place for singles."

The rise of singles, Carter observed, stems from increases in the number of divorced persons. But rather than condemnation, Carter advocated the church embrace them because they, too, "are people made in the image of God who need God to put the pieces back together."

Whether Baptists like changes "is not the point," he said. "God called us to minister."

He cautioned in the midst of change, Baptists "might change our message but not our methodology." The Lordship of Christ is the message and is a constancy Baptists dare not sacrifice, he said. Any denomination that had deviated from that message "has died a slow but sure death."

Baptists must adopt a methodology that meets people where they are. "God forbid we become Pharisees who criticize folks up North because they don't do it like it's done down South," he said. "There's enough elasticity around the cross" to allow Baptist diversity "while still clinging to the Bible."

But the message must remain constant, he insisted. "Christianity is not a democracy. The Lord Jesus Christ is not up for re-election. The head of the church never changes, the destiny of the church never changes."