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84-105

House Clears Equal Access For President's Signature

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)—Reversing its May 15 vote, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed legislation making it unlawful for public secondary schools to deny students wishing to meet for religious purposes the same rights provided other voluntary, student-initiated groups.

By a lopsided 337-77 vote, House members agreed to equal access language attached in the Senate to a bill authorizing training programs for math and science teachers. Then, on a 393-15 vote, the House accepted the remaining Senate amendments to the math-science bill (H.R. 1310), clearing the measure for President Reagan's signature.

After final passage, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs Executive Director James M. Dunn praised the bipartisan leadership which successfully steered the measure through Congress.

Dunn, whose agency joined numerous religious groups supporting the bill, called its passage "a tribute to a large number of individuals and groups who have worked for three years with the conviction secondary school students who wish to gather for religious purposes on school grounds and at their own initiative should not be singled out for discrimination."

In addition to bipartisan congressional support, Dunn lauded a coalition of religious groups pushing the measure including the National Council of Churches, the National Association of Evangelicals, the U.S. Catholic Conference and the Christian Legal Society.

"These diverse groups were brought together because the equal access bill makes sense and will make good law," Dunn added. "Its passage represents a victory for a carefully targeted, narrowly precise, guarded approach that advances religious liberty without endangering church-state separation."

Baptist Joint Committee legal assistant Gary B. McNeil told Baptist Press, "For those who spent long hours drafting and explaining equal access, this vote is a triumph.

"Because this legislation meets the strict requirements of the First Amendment," he added, "and satisfies the concerns of a wide range of religious, civil liberties and educational groups, it represents a victory for the American public."

Both House votes easily surpassed the two-thirds majority requirement under the procedure used to consider the legislation. The same procedure, which provides for one hour of debate and permits no amendments, was tried on a similar equal access measure sponsored by Rep. Don Bonker, D-Wash. The 270-151 vote on May 15 was 11 short of the two-thirds needed for passage.

Changes in the Senate-passed version produced more than enough switches in the House to hand Rep. Carl D. Perkins, D-Ky., Rep. William F. Goodling, R-Pa., and Bonker, primary sponsors of the legislation, an easy victory. Even key House opponents called the revised, Senate-passed version a significant improvement over the measure considered in May.

Unlike the original version which provided equal access for voluntary religious meetings during "non-instructional periods" before, after and during the school day, the final version protects such meetings only before and after school. Its language was broadened to bar discrimination on the basis of "religious, political, philosophical or other" content of speech at student meetings.

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The final version further prohibits discrimination against student groups on the basis of their numerical size and bars "nonschool persons" from directing, conducting, controlling or regularly attending such meetings. The final draft also assures that nothing in the bill "limits the authority of schools to maintain order and discipline on school premises, to protect the well-being of students and faculty and to assure that attendance of students at such meetings is voluntary."

These changes, along with others such as removing a provision which would have cut off federal education dollars from schools denying equal access to students, led groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Education Association, which had earlier opposed the equal access measures, to remain neutral on this vote.

Like the earlier versions, the final bill requires that meetings be voluntary and student initiated and that school personnel be present only in a non-participatory capacity and that they be prohibited from influencing the form or content of any prayer or religious activity.

Also like the original proposal, the measure passed by Congress protects equal access only when a school has a limited open forum which it defines as "whenever such schools grant an offering or an opportunity for one or more noncurriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during noninstructional time."

During final debate, opponents stuck with their charges the bill would violate the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion.

Rep. Don Edwards, D-Calif., charged that under the bill, "for the first time in our history our Federal law will license, indeed encourage religious services in your public high schools. Under any definition, this is government sponsorship of religion."

Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-N.Y., concurred, describing the measure as "a sort of 'godson of school prayer.'" Paraphrasing the words of the "very perceptive child who refused to eat his sugar-coated vegetables," Ackerman said, "this bill looks like school prayer, it tastes like school prayer and it smells like school prayer."

Bonker offered a different assessment, saying the bill "will maintain government neutrality. Government cannot mandate or prescribe prayer, but it also must not ban voluntary assembly of individuals for religious reasons."

Citing court decisions which underscored the right to use public school premises for free speech discussions of such controversial issues as the Vietnam war and gay rights, Perkins insisted: "All this legislation does is to say that students wishing to discuss religious belief among themselves are given the same right. This is no prayer bill."

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Avoid Duplication
St. Amant Charges

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
7/26/84

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (BP)—A risk is run when ministerial students are given "what amounts to a theological education on the college level," says a Southern Baptist seminary professor.

C. Penrose St. Amant, senior professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., expressed his beliefs during the 1984 H.I. Hester Lectures at the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools' annual meeting in Daytona Beach, Fla. St. Amant spoke on the "Historical Sketch of American Higher Education" and "Liberal Arts Education Today."

According to St. Amant the risk being taken by Baptist colleges is the possible cultural impairment of the liberal arts education of the pretheological student. "The major issue from my limited perspective has to do with the culture of theological students—their ability to read, write and speak clearly with some sense of English style and to discriminate between the Christian gospel and the historical forms it has assumed across the centuries."

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He said many students perform well in the narrow area of identification on exams, but poorly in expressing ideas in writing or speech. "This deficiency, which often includes lapses in grammar and spelling, is probably traceable more to inadequate elementary and high school education than to college, but whatever its source it demands attention at the college level.

"For the theological student," he said, "a grasp of English grammar and style is especially important, not in a strict, purist sense, but in the sense of an understanding of the effective uses of language in various contexts."

St. Amant said a minister is "permanently handicapped" without a sound knowledge of English, including literature, regardless of the gifts one possesses otherwise.

He told the presidents and deans biblical and religious studies on the college level should operate largely within a liberal arts context. "What is needed is a good grasp of the content of the Scripture, a historical and grammatical approach to its interpretation and its place in western culture and the history of the ancient world."

Technical and detailed interpretations of Hebrew and Greek texts, he continued, and stress upon textual, source, form and redaction criticism and hermeneutics had better wait for seminary specialization. St. Amant emphasized the issue had nothing to do with the competence of college professors versus seminary teachers.

"The issue involves what is appropriate in the light of the purpose of a liberal arts education compared with the purpose of seminary studies. The issue is largely the same for premedical students; they need chemistry and biology in college but not internal medicine and psychiatry. What is the point in duplicating professional theological education on the collegiate level?" he charged.

Enormous financial and personal investment has gone into the six seminaries sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention that are prepared to provide solid theological education and they should be utilized, he said.

He called for a greater integration of curricula and more exchange of seminary and college professors. "Genuine dialogue between the colleges and seminaries would be a step forward, especially if accompanied by exchanges of professors as a matter not of sporadic practice, but of policy and if modest expectations rather than elaborate guidelines were the goal.

"My purpose is to stress liberal arts education as an essential basis on which meaningful work depends and to underline its values as a continuing context within which vocations are more interesting and effective," he concluded.

St. Amant said professional competence is enhanced by the larger horizons of life which a liberal arts education provides. "Men are men and women are women before they are physicians, lawyers, teachers or ministers; and if their education makes them capable and sensitive men and women, they will be capable and sensitive physicians, lawyers, teachers or ministers."

While technicians are a must for today's fast-paced society, the greater need is for broadly educated people, including technicians, who are sensitive to cultural and spiritual values, he said. "The expert needs to be an educated expert."

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Costa Ricans, Mission See
New Spirit of Cooperation

By Bob Stanley

Baptist Press
7/26/84

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (BP)--The framework seems to be emerging for stronger cooperation in Baptist evangelistic work in Costa Rica.

Two Baptist associations have formally invited the Costa Rica Baptist Mission to relate to them in evangelism and as many other areas of work as possible, reports Bob Compton, missionary press representative. "This is the first breakthrough of this type since the Costa Rica Baptist Convention severed relationships with the mission in 1980," Compton said.

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The breakthrough came after a series of meetings involving leadership of the National Association of Baptist Churches, the Atlantic Zone Regional Association and the mission (organization of the 15 Southern Baptist missionaries working in the country). The remaining Costa Rican Baptist churches, affiliated with the Costa Rica Baptist Convention, continue their cooperation with American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

David Guevara, pastor of First Baptist Church, San Pedro, observed, "We are living in a most crucial moment in our history. We must unite our efforts in getting the gospel to as many people as possible."

Guevara heads the social work group, one of 11 areas in which Costa Rican Baptists and missionaries hope to work together more closely. He has been a key leader of the National Association of Baptist Churches, a group formed by 17 churches that boycotted the annual meeting in which the convention broke relations with the mission.

The convention severed relations when the mission refused to send several of its missionaries home, as the convention's executive committee requested. The mission said there was no moral, doctrinal or financial reason for the missionaries to be sent home.

"Since numerous churches continued to request the services of the missionaries, it would have violated Baptist principles of relationship to have acceded to the convention demands," said Don Kammerdiener, director for the Foreign Mission Board work in Middle America and the Caribbean.

In the past three years missionaries have worked informally with the new associations and other churches where they were invited to help, and the missionaries have attempted to involve Costa Ricans more fully in committees related to various aspects of the work.

Missionary Clive R. Buttemere, chairman of the program of evangelism and missions, reports special progress in cooperative evangelistic efforts. Fifteen new Bible studies, missions or churches have started in the past year, more than double the projected goal. Monthly meetings of the evangelism group have been held with Costa Ricans present as invited advisers.

A "growing sense of community, brotherhood and common purpose" emerged, Buttemere said, and Costa Rican Baptists began to express desire to "win Costa Rica for Christ" and to deepen the Baptist constituency's understanding of Baptist principles, doctrine and methodology.

Expressing frustration over the inadequacy of various solo efforts, Costa Rican Baptists called for a meeting in Siquirres to discuss how more effective cooperation could be fostered, particularly in the area of evangelism.

Participants listed more than 20 needs, identified priority concerns and projected action plans and goals for evangelism. Buttemere reported two evangelism workshops growing out of this planning, and led by Jose Missena of Asuncion, Paraguay, reached more than 150 Baptist leaders and almost all churches in the two associations. Missena is the Foreign Mission Board's church growth consultant for Latin America.

Buttemere said cooperation in evangelism most likely will be project-oriented to respect each entity's desire to maintain its autonomy.

Working alongside missionaries in assisting the churches will be teams from First Baptist Church, Midland, Texas, which has entered a three-year partnership with Costa Rican Baptists.

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Music Should Meet Needs
Of People In The Pew

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
7/26/84

(Editor's note: This is the third part in a four-part series on congregational singing.)

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)—The people in the pew need hymns to lean on, hymns of encouragement and hymns that speak of the pain and joy in relationships with people and with God—and they all must be rooted in Bible teachings.

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In a nutshell, that's the song-writing and conducting philosophy of Gene Bartlett, a man whose influence pervades the small and large churches of Oklahoma, as well as many throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.

Bartlett, state music secretary for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma for 26 years, directed the music each year at Falls Creek Assembly, a summer spiritual phenomenon attended by 250,000 people, mostly youth, between 1954 and his retirement in 1980.

He began writing music at the age of 40 and his credits include "Set My Soul Afire," "Tell the Good News," "Grace So Amazing," and the music to "Here Is My Life."

"Some anthems are great music and worthy to be sung," said Bartlett. "But Southern Baptists have more small churches and if we're going to stay with the people, it's got to be in hymn singing." He favors a current trend back to including the singing of choruses during worship services because they are easy to remember and can be sung by children, the group he feels is most often neglected by worship planners.

"Many choruses are tunes set to Scriptures. I delight in this. I think we don't sing from memory enough," said Bartlett. "We've held to the book too closely. We need to be more spontaneous in a religious, spiritual way. The kids love to just haul off and sing."

He said the contemporary gospel compositions of Bill and Gloria Gaither have strongly influenced a new style of music being sung in many churches today. "They (Gaithers) have a real talent for writing a song that becomes famous and is easy enough for people to catch on and sing after hearing it played one time," said Bartlett. He cited as examples the songs "Something Beautiful" and "Because He Lives."

Bartlett is the second generation of his family to give his life to educating Baptists and others about church music. His father, E.M. Bartlett, directed singing schools in Arkansas for many years before any seminaries offered church music education. He also composed hundreds of hymns, including "Victory in Jesus."

"The value of congregational singing is to solidify a group in worship," said Bartlett. "Churches which specialize in hymn singing are a better-knit group. Everyone who comes to church should experience worship."

Bartlett patterned his music education efforts in Oklahoma after those of missionaries in foreign countries who develop Christian music in styles and on subjects indigenous to the culture. "For example, my dad wrote indigenous music to the country music styles of the uneducated person," he explained.

God's grace and forgiveness and the importance of faith are three themes Bartlett has emphasized in hymns he has written and used in worship. Not surprisingly, among his own music "God's Grace Is Enough for Me" and "Grace So Amazing" are two of his favorites. "Knowing who I've been and where I am today, there's nothing like the grace of God," he reflected.

"It Takes Faith" and "Don't You Quit" are two of his more recent compositions which he wrote for the youth at Falls Creek but which also have become "leaning hymns" for himself. Bartlett suffers from Parkinson's disease.

Bartlett departed from his traditional gospel style when he wrote the music to "Here Is My Life," the theme song for Mission 70, a nationwide gathering of Baptist college students between Christmas and New Year's of 1969, during the era of campus rebellion.

Through the music, Bartlett said, "I was trying to capture the mood of the late 60s, to speak to college students in a musical language they could understand. I don't guess a day passes but what I don't think of those 5,000 young people at Mission 70 singing 'Here Is My Life' for the first time and then wanting to sing it again," he recalled.

Bartlett is optimistic about the future of congregational singing among Southern Baptists. "I think congregational singing will improve gradually," he said. "I hope as it does improve that more songs will be written in everyday language that people can understand."



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