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USA Today reports church's nod
of SBC stance on Disney drift

Baptist Press
6/20/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A 2,000-member congregation has been carried onto the pages of USA Today via the Southern Baptist Convention's threatened boycott of the Walt Disney Company.

"If ... the values of the leaders of Disney trickle down through the products and the films ... it's eventually going to have the hearts" and minds of the children, Carter Gates, a member of Grove Avenue Baptist Church, Richmond, Va., was quoted as saying in a USA Today article June 19, "Southern Baptists aim at Disney's liberalism," on the front of the Life section.

Gates tells the national paper he is concerned that issues like "homosexual marriages and all those things" will become part of the message Disney conveys to America's youth.

Kids "love Mickey Mouse," Gates is quoted as saying. "They love Donald Duck. They love all the Disney products."

However, he asks, "How far before you'll be able to ... sell the youth on being sensitive and open and tolerant of all different lifestyles and therefore really change the way America is through the hearts and minds of the youth?"

The USA Today article, by Katy Kelly, begins by recounting that Gates' 11-year-old daughter, Paige, "would love to visit Disney World. Until last Wednesday, her chances were pretty good." That day, June 12, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution voicing concern over Disney's moral drift and threatening a boycott.

USA Today's Kelly writes Gates and his wife, Judi -- who had honeymooned at Disneyland in California -- had sent for brochures about a Disney World vacation in Orlando, Fla.

But now, Kelly writes, the Gateses have "changed their minds and their plans," reflecting a view expressed in the SBC resolution that "in recent years, the Disney Company has given the appearance that the promotion of homosexuality is more important than its historic commitment to traditional family values."

The USA Today article notes Grove Avenue's pastor, Ron Boswell, a former missionary with the SBC Foreign Mission Board, planned to voice support for the boycott in his sermon June 23, which also is watched by 10,000-15,000 people on TV.

Writes Kelly: "This Sunday, Boswell will tell his flock about the (SBC) resolution. And he'll tell them that he, a 61-year-old man who loves Winnie the Pooh, and doting grandfather of eight, is walking away. He's doing this even though two years ago he and his wife, Marlene, enjoyed Disney World. He'll tell them he's doing this because he thinks it's the moral thing to do. He expects when he's finished telling his flock, they'll agree."

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Boswell, in an interview, tells USA Today people have a "feeling of betrayal" toward Disney. "In one generation we lost something very real and good and moral and ethical. The high ground was there. (We feel) a sense of loss and hurt and 'Golly, I didn't think they'd ever do that.'"

Church member Bonnie Northern, whose children are grown, says she nevertheless will do "whatever makes the most impact." She tells USA Today about a local theater that showed "The Last Temptation of Christ," recounting, "... we didn't just boycott the movie. We said, 'We will never go to that theater (again).' And it went out of business."

The USA Today article notes, "Some Southern Baptist churches aren't buying the idea of a boycott," quoting Jim Slatton, pastor of Richmond's River Road Baptist Church: "Our congregation will scarcely take notice of this. Those that are aware of it will find it ludicrous In my opinion a lot of Baptists find this whole gesture embarrassing. It's bemusing but it's not going to have any impact."

Slatton adds the SBC "can't move this group in lockstep."

In a related USA Today article June 19, pop vocalist Peabo Bryson, who is identified as a Southern Baptist, is quoted as commenting about the SBC stance, "I don't see what the big hoopla is -- I'm sorry, I just don't get it." Bryson adds the threatened boycott doesn't represent every Baptist's opinion.

Bryson's vocal talents have been featured in the theme of the Disney movie, "Beauty and the Beast," and in "Aladdin." He also was a featured singer at the June 19 premiere of "The Huntchback of Notre Dame" in the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans -- the same site of the Southern Baptist Convention meeting the previous week.

The main USA Today article referenced a number of the Disney-related concerns of the SBC and of members of Grove Avenue Baptist Church, including:

- the movie "Priest," which the SBC contended "disparages Christian values," produced by the Disney subsidiary Miramax, which also produced the violent film "Pulp Fiction."

- Disney's "Pocahontas," which failed to reflect that the real Pocahontas was a Christian.

- the publishing of a teen book, "Growing Up Gay: From Left Out to Coming Out" by the Disney subsidiary Hyperion.

- the provision of health insurance benefits to live-in partners of homosexual employees but not unmarried partners of heterosexual employees.

In another development, the July issue of the AFA Journal, published by the American Family Association, voices concern that Disney and McDonald's have agreed on a 10-year worldwide marketing alliance to include cross-promotions involving both companies.

The AFA article notes, "The sponsorship pact means the Disney name will be put before the 33 million people who visit McDonald's on an average day, and the Golden Arches will become the title sponsor of some of the new high profile attractions at Disney theme parks and resorts."

The AFA stated, "... the link is troubling because both companies, which built their fortunes on the family, are now drifting away from (that) base," referencing its ongoing national TV monitoring placing McDonald's and Disney "among the top ten sponsors of television programs promoting the homosexual agenda."

The article asks: "What's to stop Disney from using its side of the deal to promote films like 'Pulp Fiction' and 'Priest,' both of which are geared to adults, on the McDonald's counter right next to the latest Happy Meal tie-in with Disney's latest animated kids film?"

AFA President Donald Wildmon is quoted as saying: "It's an entirely new challenge for families. We can sit still and do nothing and let this new corporate media machine roll over us or ... act now and let both sides (Disney and McDonald's) know people are watching and will vote on the success of the joint promotions with a most powerful weapon -- the dollar."

The AFA Journal listed the two companies' corporate addresses, chairmen and phone and fax numbers:

-- McDonald's, Chairman Michael R. Quinlan, 1 Kroc Drive, Oak Brook, IL 60521; phone, (708) 575-3000; fax, (708) 575-6942.

-- The Walt Disney Company, Chairman Michael Eisner, 500 S. Buena Vista St., Burbank, CA 91521; phone, (818) 560-1000; fax, (818) 560-1930.

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Compiled by Art Toalston.

**ATS ends probation early
for Southwestern Seminary**

By Brian Smith

**Baptist Press
6/20/96**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Commission on Accrediting has reaffirmed the accreditation of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and lifted the two-year probation imposed in January 1995 following the dismissal of then-President Russell Dilday. Dilday was fired in March 1994 by the seminary board of trustees.

In a June 14 letter to seminary President Ken Hemphill, Daniel Aleshire, associate director for the Commission of Accrediting, said the commission voted "That Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary be removed from probation and its accreditation be reaffirmed."

"We're extremely pleased at the action of the commission," said Scotty Gray, Southwestern executive vice president. "We have had a very good relationship with our accrediting agency, and we're pleased to have this reaffirmation of our institution."

Four criteria were involved in the commission's decision, Aleshire said, noting Southwestern will have to report to the commission by April 15, 1997, concerning the status of the seminary relative to each area. The criteria are:

-- The board of trustees demonstrates that it continues consistently to make decisions about personnel -- both administrative and faculty -- according to formally adopted criteria and procedures.

-- The board continues to demonstrate that it is paying attention to its own continuing education and development.

-- Faculty and students can continue to attest, through some fair and appropriate means, that their freedom of inquiry, within the seminary's confessional boundaries, is assured. In addition, that trustees have made reasonable efforts to assure a stable institutional environment that supports the ministry of teaching, research and service.

-- The seminary should demonstrate continued development of its newly instituted procedures -- in particular the ombudsman system -- in the direction of health maintenance for the institution, rather than primarily as an instrument for meeting grievances and managing conflicts.

When imposed in 1995, the probation was intended to run until January 1997. While Southwestern's accreditation was never revoked, the commission placed the seminary on probation because, in its judgment, the board of trustees failed to exert consistent and disciplined efforts to provide regular and ongoing evaluation of the president; to ensure faculty appointments, promotion and tenure decisions carefully correspond to published policies; and to attend sensitively to the several constituencies and publics of the seminary.

Jack D. Terry Jr., vice president for institutional advancement said the commission's report was "marvelous news."

"We are thankful for all the hard work that's been done by the trustees, ombudsman committees, the Presidential Blue Ribbon Committee, the faculty, staff and student body who provided the materials upon which this reaffirmation of accreditation was determined," Terry said. "We are grateful to our president and the leadership he has given during the months leading to this decision by the ATS commission."

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Abortion, homosexuality cases
returned to appeals courts

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court recently returned to federal appeals courts cases involving the controversial issues of abortion and homosexuality, with conservative justices in the majority once and in the minority the other time.

Voting 5-4, the high court gave new life to a Utah law restricting abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy. The justices reversed a decision of the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, which had struck down the law on a procedural basis, and returned the case to the same court.

Voting 6-3, however, the justices vacated an appeals court opinion upholding a Cincinnati measure prohibiting civil rights based on homosexuality and returned the case to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals for consideration in light of the high court's recent *Romer v. Evans* decision. In its May decision in *Romer*, the justices ruled as unconstitutional a Colorado amendment which banned local or state laws granting civil rights status to homosexuals.

In the abortion case, Associate Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy joined the court's conservative wing -- Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Associate Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas -- in reviving pro-life hopes for expanded limits on late-term abortions.

A 1991 Utah law prohibited abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy except to save the mother's life, to "prevent grave damage" to the woman's medical health or to "prevent the birth of a child that would be born with grave defects." Another part of the law limited abortions in the first 20 weeks with the same exceptions, plus rape and incest.

A federal court struck down the part of the law restricting abortions in the first half of pregnancy but upheld the part limiting procedures in the second half. The 10th Circuit, however, ruled the portions could not be separated, therefore rendering the constitutional part unenforceable.

In returning the case to the 10th Circuit, the high court's majority said the lower court's opinion in *Leavitt v. Jane L.* "is flatly contradicted" by a provision in the same portion "explicitly stating that each statutory provision was to be regarded as having been enacted independently of the others."

Associate Justice John Paul Stevens said in his dissent the issue is one solely of state law and the high court's action breaks with its practice in such cases. Associate Justices David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer joined Stevens in the dissent.

The same six justices who joined together to strike down Colorado's Amendment 2 in the *Romer* opinion voted without comment to return the Cincinnati case to the Sixth Circuit. As in the *Romer* decision, Scalia, joined by Rehnquist and Thomas, dissented.

The result of outlawing the amendment to the Cincinnati charter "would be that nowhere in the country may the people decide, in democratic fashion, not to accord special protection to homosexuals," Scalia wrote. "Unelected heads of city departments and agencies, who are in other respects (as democratic theory requires) subject to the control of the people, must, where special protection for homosexuals are concerned, be permitted to do what they please. This is such an absurd proposition that *Romer*, which did not involve the issue, cannot possibly be thought to have embraced it."

Will Dodson, legal counsel and director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said, "Justice Scalia is exactly right in his dissenting opinion that the holding in the *Romer* case does not apply to the Cincinnati case. I'm sure that the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals has to be scratching their heads over the Supreme Court's decision. How is it possible to reconsider their decision in light of a case which does not apply?"

The Supreme Court "has quit its role as constitutional umpire and is now batting cleanup for the homosexual rights movement," said Robert Knight, the Family Research Council's director of cultural studies, in a prepared statement. "Let's hope and pray that the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals won't be cowed into creating more bad law."

The case is *Equality Foundation v. Cincinnati*.

Both decisions were announced June 17.

EDITORS' NOTE: A (BP) photo has been posted in SBCNet News Room to accompany the (BP) story, "SBC officials establish fund for arson-caused church fires," dated 6/18/96. The photo, it should be noted, is of the remains of a Southern Baptist church building in Stone Mountain, Ga., a congregation with 33 African American members.

The cutline reads:

INVESTIGATION CONTINUING--In addition to the nearly 40 African American churches that have been the target of arsonists across the country in recent months, a Southern Baptist congregation also may have been a victim of an attack in the early morning hours of June 17. An investigation by FBI, ATF and local officials remained under way June 20 of a fire at Pine Lake Baptist Church, Stone Mountain, Ga. The congregation averages 250 people on Sunday mornings and has 33 black members, according to interim pastor Randy Mullis. The church's first building, a wood-and-siding structure built in 1949, was destroyed; it was being used as a children's activity center. According to church neighbors, the sound of a car speeding away from the site was heard around 2 a.m. and almost immediately the building was on fire. (BP) photo by James Dotson

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