



BAPTIST PRESS

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March 24, 1977

77-55

Court to Decide Validity of D. C. Church Bequest Law

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court announced here it will decide if a District of Columbia law which invalidates certain bequests to churches and ministers violates the First Amendment.

A D. C. law on the books for more than 100 years states that a bequest "to a minister, priest, rabbi, public teacher, or preacher of the gospel . . . or to a religious sect, order or denomination" must be made at least 30 days before a person's death in order to be valid.

Two Washington churches, Calvary Baptist and St. Matthews Cathedral, a Roman Catholic church, challenged the statute in D.C. Superior Court, which ruled in 1975 that the law violated the free exercise of religion clause of the First Amendment. Last year, the D. C. Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court's decision.

At issue is the will of Sallye Lipscomb French, a Washington resident who died on November 2, 1972, less than 30 days after making out a will on October 13, 1972. She left one-third of her estate to Calvary Baptist Church and another one-third to St. Matthews Cathedral.

After losing in the two D. C. courts, the natural heirs of Mrs. French appealed to the Supreme Court. Her attorneys argue that the D. C. law "regulates a secular activity and does not violate the free exercise clause."

They argue further that the reason for such laws is that "religious organizations, unlike other persons or organizations, appeal to a testator's interest in the salvation of his soul" and "can exert a particularly strong and unique influence on one whose death" is imminent. The D. C. law was created, they conclude, "to avoid such deathbed bequests."

In a written brief submitted to the high court, attorneys for Calvary Baptist Church argued that "there is no evidence that (the church) made any attempts to influence" Mrs. French in making her bequests.

The church tried unsuccessfully to convince the justices to refuse the case outright or, as an alternative, simply to affirm the lower courts' decisions.

The case will not be argued until the high court reconvenes in October after its traditional summer recess. No decision is expected until late this year at the earliest.

Congress Urges Jewish
Rights In Soviet Union

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WASHINGTON (BP)--By an overwhelming majority the U. S. House of Representatives passed a resolution concerning the freedom of movement of Soviet Jews and other minorities. The Senate had passed the measure earlier.

The resolution, which passed by a vote of 400-2 in the House and 91-0 in the Senate, calls on the Soviet government to honor its "pledge to facilitate freer movement of people, expedite the reunification of families, and uphold the general freedom to leave one's country."

Discussion on the House floor pointed to recent abuses in the Soviet Union against Jews.

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U. S. Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D.-Cal.) said, "In the past few weeks, the Soviet government has chosen to crack down hard against those who simply wish to practice their religion, and against those who continue to speak out for reform.

"In January, the Soviet government banned the importation of Matzohs, which are essential to the observation of Passover," Waxman continued.

"On March 5, the government accused several leading dissidents, all of them Jews, of working for the Central Intelligence Agency. Ten days later, one Soviet Jew, Anatoly Scharansky, was arrested for espionage," he charged.

Waxman also cited the arrest of other dissidents, who have had no formal charges filed against them and a prime time television program sponsored by the Soviet government, which accused Israel and "Zionist sympathizers of duping Jews into emigrating."

Waxman noted systematic persecution of Jews over the years and charged that the Soviet government is now engaged in "an ugly and utterly irresponsible campaign" to portray Jews who wish to emigrate as traitors.

U. S. Rep. Toby Moffett (D.-Conn.), who sponsored a resolution in the House similar to the Senate measure which was voted on, noted that the action of Congress was in line with the foreign policy of President Carter.

"Human rights is not a problem to be solved; it is a cause that has been evolving for 20 centuries . . . such a policy has been taking shape quite rapidly during the still nascent term of President Carter. The President is providing extraordinary leadership in this area and it is fitting and necessary that Congress should seek every opportunity to support him," Moffett told his colleagues.

Last year, in an unprecedented move, Congress passed a resolution calling for the release of dissident Baptist minister Georgi Vins from prison. Vins had been imprisoned for carrying out his pastoral duties of teaching and preaching.

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Mob Attacks Tent
Set Up For Revival

Baptist Press
3/24/77

TAMBO, Ecuador (BP)--Three men reported to be Roman Catholic priests led a mob of Indians in an attack on a Baptist revival tent here, according to Pat (Mrs. James C.) Muse, Southern Baptist missionary press representative.

Two nationals were injured in the incident on March 20 and the tent was almost totally destroyed.

(Outright conflict between Baptists and Catholics on the mission field today is unusual, according to spokesmen at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, in Richmond, Va. In many countries, they even cooperate in some projects, such as Bible distribution.)

The tent meetings had been scheduled as an evangelistic thrust to the Quechua-speaking Indians here, despite previous persecution of believers in the area.

The man who led the group of about 500 rural Indians entered the tent late Sunday afternoon while final preparations were being made for the first service of the campaign. Dressed as an Indian, he marched forward authoritatively and demanded immediate departure of the tent and everyone with it, according to Mrs. Muse.

The mob followed him, tearing down everything, even splitting one of the large wooden support beams. People of the area identified this leader and two others in the group as men they knew to be Roman Catholic priests.

Mrs. Muse said the leaders further threatened that if everything was not gone by the following day they would be back to burn it all and there would be bloodshed. At the same time, anti-North American messages were voiced over the loudspeaker of the Catholic Church.

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When Southern Baptist Missionary James C. Muse Jr. sensed trouble was coming, he went to get help from Canar, some 15 miles away. Police there came back to Tambo with Muse, only to find the worst of the damage had been done.

The men at the tent had tried to tell the mob that legal written permission had been given by the proper authorities to conduct the evangelistic services in the tent.

The town law officers stood up to the leader and told him clearly that he was breaking the law, but it seemed to make no difference, according to Mrs. Muse. Afterwards, the constable wrote an official denouncement to the governor of the province.

Luis Torres, the Ecuadorian who supervises maintenance of the tent and its erection for tent revivals, received a hard blow to his head during the incident. Another man was injured by a rock.

An earlier revival at Canar, the provincial capital, was also the scene of a disturbance. On the last day of that meeting, a drunken man identified as a priest led about 40 other seemingly intoxicated persons in dismantling and doing some damage to the tent. No one was injured. A service was held that evening, although the tent was already down.

Because of a mob incident in October 1975, Southern Baptist missionary Archie V. Jones said before this most recent effort that missionaries had no idea what to expect from the revivals. "The possibilities for results are astounding, but the possibilities for adverse reaction are also astounding," he said.

Ecuador Baptists were to lead the revival. The Muses and Southern Baptist Missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Gerald W. Doyle, who helped to organize the meetings, have returned to their homes, according to Dorothy (Mrs. James P.) Gilbert, Southern Baptist missionary to Ecuador who has just arrived in the United States for furlough. She indicated the Ecuador Baptists wanted to go ahead with the revival but didn't know if they had. Mrs. Gilbert said most people of Tambo were favorable toward the revival plans.

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'Rethinking of Gospel Could
Mean World Evangelization'

Baptist Press
3/24/77

By James Lee Young

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A rethinking and new understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ by Southern Baptists in the next decade could result in an unparalleled worldwide evangelistic thrust by the denomination, a leading Southern Baptist planner of almost 20 years predicted here.

But "we will not reform the gospel; that would be sacrilege," said Albert McClellan, program planning director and associate executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, during a conference on the future attended by 250 denominational leaders at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center. The event was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

"We will come to a new understanding of the gospel and will confront the world with its power to change even the most modern of men," McClellan stressed. He later told Baptist Press that when the denomination does come to the "new understanding" of the gospel, "it could mean a worldwide evangelistic move like we've never seen before."

The machinery for the worldwide evangelistic thrust has already been set into motion, he told Baptist Press with the Southern Baptist "Bold Mission" strategy of evangelizing the world by the year 2000.

For that, and other major endeavors of the denomination, to succeed in coming years, it will take change, McClellan said. He believes the denomination will have the courage to change.

"Their power and model for change will be Jesus Christ within them," he told conference participants.

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At the same time, McClellan spoke to what he called a "new, emerging Baptist consciousness," which he says will face formidable barriers that ironically and ultimately will help to strengthen the denomination.

Four remaining projections for the denomination over the next decade, besides rethinking the gospel and having the courage to change, McClellan said, include:

"1--Southern Baptists will strengthen their basic doctrinal ideology. Our basic points of dogma are unique in their relationship to each other. We will develop an adequate theology for our uniqueness. We will not lose our denominational identity, but will justify our uniqueness to the world . . .

"2--The denomination will redefine and reform its institutional life. For 70 years, we have grown increasingly dependent on the denominational institutional life. Again, hear me correctly. I'm not speaking of institutes, but of institutional life, the concept that institutionalizes the denomination so that it becomes the church on which the congregations depend," he continued.

"I believe there will be a renewal of the concept of the denomination as a movement, organized, essential, vital, but not itself in organized form a substitute for the Body of Christ.

"3--Southern Baptists will rediscover the true source of their power. They will find it not in techniques and methodologies. Techniques are not substitutes for quality and excellence. They will not find it in the institutions. But they will find it in themselves, through an authentic, spirit-filled experience of Christ within them. The new consciousness surely will have a spiritual dimension.

"4--Southern Baptists will give methodologies their rightful places. For 70 years, we have been preoccupied with methods, sometimes to the point of not securing full awareness in the minds of the people of the real meaning of the gospel," he said.

"In the last 10 years, we've begun to deal meaningfully with religious truth. In the next 10 years, there may be even more of this. Hopefully, we will learn to debate issues, not labels. We will change our agendas to secure a more churchly type of meeting."

McClellan also addressed himself to the emergence and evolving of Baptist consciousness, traced from evangelical preaching of 200 years ago. Baptist consciousness today, he continued, includes the present characteristics of the doctrinal, evangelistic, the missionary, denominational, educational and ethical or social.

The ethical or social element is the newest characteristic and can be traced "back to the War Between the States, back even beyond that to founding of the first orphanages in America and even back to John Leland and Roger Williams, who made their stands for religious liberty," he declared.

He cited as examples of a shift in consciousness, changes in Baptist society that have come generally to recognize "Sunday ballgames as a part of almost every American home," the acceptance and glorification of entertainers who are Christians, whereas in bygone days they were "generally not looked on with favor by many Baptists."

McClellan further cited, "My childhood church turned people out for (any kind of) dancing. Today dance (interpretive and modern) is a part of the worship services of some Baptist churches," he said.

"Not all Baptists are equally committed to all six of the major characteristics of Baptist consciousness," he cautioned. "Not all are willing to recognize all of them as important" or even necessary.

"The independent church movement and the rise of para-denominational bodies hammering at the door of the (SBC) churches may indicate some shift in denominational consciousness . . . Their impact(s) should be carefully studied," he told participants. "Whatever our new consciousness is to be," McClellan continued, "its formation faces barriers, most of them the same barriers faced all over the world--such a population, environmental destruction, man's technological race against himself, and nuclear weaponry."

Among those barriers Southern Baptists face in serving a new Baptist consciousness, McClellan said, are deadening of emotions, loss of tradition, loss of inner moral stabilizers and manipulation through mass media.

"They are typical of such forces that operate against us . . . to change us, and, more importantly, they offer us opportunities. Barriers like that will help shape our new consciousness.

"What lies ahead? Who knows?" McClellan stated. "I think a new element in Southern Baptist consciousness will be entirely different from the old . . ."