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79-14

**Israeli Law Said Not Meant  
To Limit Religious Freedom**

By Elizabeth F. Smith and Ruth Fowler

TEL AVIV, Israel (BP)--A new official interpretation of Israel's controversial anti-bribery law says the law was never intended to limit religious freedom.

The interpretation, given by Minister of Justice Shmuel Tamir, received official status by being made a part of the official gazette of the Knesset (parliament), the "Knesset Protocol."

Tamir's interpretation came after a visit to Israel by Jimmy Allen, Southern Baptist Convention president, to discuss the law and express Baptist concern for religious liberty. The interpretation by Tamir previously had been only stated verbally and in correspondence.

The law, passed by the Knesset in December 1977, prohibits offering material or other benefits to someone to induce him to change religions. The interpretation states "there is no intention whatsoever on the part of the Israeli government to restrict in any way the religious freedom of the Christian community or any other community in Israel or to impede them from the pursuit of normal educational or philanthropic activities."

Allen and Baptist leaders in Israel are pleased with this official interpretation. J. D. Hughey, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's secretary for Europe, the Middle East and South Asia, said he was "very glad indeed" to have the clarification which he hopes will be accepted as a guarantee of religious freedom.

Allen pointed out that in the Israeli legal system, the proper way to obtain an official opinion that is binding on the attorney general is to question the law in the Knesset record. Tamir's official interpretation was given in answer to a two-part question submitted by Knesset member Yitzhak Berman.

"I'm grateful for the steps of interpretation that have been taken in good faith by the current administration of the government of Israel," Allen said. "I believe the world looks to Israel with high expectations for the respect of the rights of minorities and for the recognition of freedom of religion."

"We are particularly eager for the basic law on personal rights now being debated by the Knesset to reflect a strong emphasis on religious liberty," Allen said.

Other leaders reacted in similar fashion. Finlay M. Graham, the board's field representative for the Middle East, said he felt the interpretation was a step in the right direction and he accepts it "as a face-saving expression" for the Israeli government.

"I hope the government will be very hesitant in its application of the implied letter of the law," Graham said. "I do accept the sincerity of Minister Tamir in his desire to promote good relations between different religious groups in the country."

Dale G. Thorne, chairman of the organization of Southern Baptist representatives in Israel, expressed appreciation to Allen for his conversation with officials. "We are hopeful that the continued contact between Baptists and government leaders will result in a greater understanding of Baptists and general Christian positions in the country," Thorne said.

Robert L. Lindsey, veteran Southern Baptist representative in Israel, affirmed the value of Allen's visit and reaffirmed Baptists' opposition to bribery as a means of persuading someone to change religions.

He emphasized that Baptists have been concerned about the misinterpretation of the law and have never practiced bribery for conversion.

The law has been the subject of many government-Christian exchanges since passed by the Knesset, Dec. 27, 1977. At least one incident of harassment of a group of Jewish-Christian believers has occurred, without official government sanction, according to Southern Baptist missionaries.

Some 200 religious extremists forced entry into a believer's home, tore up Bibles and hymnbooks, brandished their fists and shouted abusive language as they rampaged through the home.

The official clarification came in response to this two-part question raised by Knesset member Berman:

"Question no. 2855: On Dec. 27, 1977, the Knesset passed a law 'amendment to the penal code (enticement to change of religion) 1977', which forbade the giving and receiving of material advantages as an inducement to change one's religion. According to reports in the daily newspapers, certain groups abroad are attributing purposes which are not stated in the law and were not intended by the lawmakers. I request answers to the following: 1. Does the government have a response to the said interpretations? If so, what is the character of this response? 2. Has the law been applied since its inception? If so, in which instances?"

In answer to the first part of the question, Minister Tamir said the position of the government was contained in a letter he had written in February 1978, to Richard Maas, president of the American Jewish Committee. He then submitted that entire letter to be printed in the "Knesset Protocol" (gazette). Two main points are made in the letter. First, "I can assure you that there is no intention whatsoever on the part of the Israeli government to restrict in any way religious freedom of the Christian community or any other community in Israel or to impede them from the pursuit of normal educational or philanthropic activities."

Second: "...instructions have been given by the Attorney General that no action or even enquiry be instituted by virtue of this law without the prior direct authorizations of the Attorney General in person or the state attorney in person."

Minister Tamir said that he had made known this position to Allen in a meeting Jan. 1, 1979.

To the second part of the question Minister Tamir answered that since the law's passage there has not been a single case of prosecution under the law's provisions.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.

Elizabeth F. Smith is a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board representative to Israel, where she serves as press representative.

New Course on Ministers' Wives  
Approved for Seminary Extension

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Development of a course for and about ministers' wives was approved during the annual meeting of the seminary committees which give direction to the Seminary Extension Department.

Among other actions were approval of a name change for the department's series of study materials for seminary graduates and an extension of its emphasis on bi-vocational and ethnic ministers.

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A number of ministers' wives have taken advantage of the theologically oriented courses offered by Seminary Extension, but the new course will be the first tailored specifically for them.

In approving the course, the Seminary Extension curriculum committee, made up of faculty representatives from each of the six seminaries, designated John Howell of Mid-western Baptist Theological Seminary to serve as a special consultant to the team enlisted to write the course. Dean Howell has led conferences for ministers' wives at both Ridgecrest and Glorieta conference centers.

When it's available, the course will be offered for study either in a Seminary Extension center or through the department's Home Study Institute.

The curriculum series name-change was approved by the Seminary Extension Administrative Committee, composed of the presidents of the six seminaries. A variety of cassette study programs and other learning resources now known as the "Personal-Career Development Series" will be changed to the "CESA Series." "CESA" is an acronym for "Continuing Education for Seminary Alumni."

Department Director Raymond M. Rigdon requested and received an extension of the department's two-year emphasis on help for bi-vocational and ethnic ministers.

Also approved during the meetings of the two committees were:

A new Seminary Extension diploma program in biblical studies;

Three new Old Testament survey courses;

A new course in systematic theology;

Guidelines for developing Seminary Extension courses for language-group pastors;

An annual review of fees for certificate and diploma programs; and

An optional plan permitting students completing Seminary Extension college-level courses to use the credit registry of the American Council on Education.

The presidents agreed to invite seminary directors of continuing education to participate in part of next year's curriculum committee meeting to help evaluate Seminary Extension services to seminary alumni.

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Baptist Principal  
A Sniper Victim

Baptist Press  
1/30/79

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (BP)--A Southern Baptist elementary school principal was one of two persons killed by a 16-year-old sniper, who opened fire on the school across from her home Jan. 29 as children walked to classes.

Burton Wragg, 53, was shot while he attempted to help children who moments earlier had been shot by the teenage girl. Wragg died at a local hospital while undergoing surgery for severe stomach wounds.

Wragg, who was transferred to the Cleveland Elementary School just five months before, was a charter member of the First Baptist Church of Del Cerro in La Mesa.

After the initial shooting the sniper barricaded herself inside her home with a .22 caliber rifle and up to 500 rounds of ammunition. She held scores of police at bay for six hours before surrendering.

The girl gave little reason for her shooting spree. "I don't like Mondays. This livens up the day," she told a newspaper reporter who reached her by telephone during the ordeal.

Also dead was Michael Suthar, 53, a custodian at the school. The wounded included a San Diego police officer and eight school children.

Wragg became the second member of the Del Cerro church who has died a violent death within the past four months. Jane Wyle-Stitz, an airline stewardess, died last September when the Pacific Southwest Airlines aircraft in which she was a passenger crashed in the San Diego residential area, killing 151.

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Time Passes Around  
Mrs. Francis' Classes

By Lynn P. Clayton

DERIDDER, La. (BP)--Brand new 1920 model cars were rolling off assembly lines. World War I had ended two years previously. And Mrs. Francis had just started teaching Sunday School at First Baptist Church, DeRidder, La.

The 1920 cars are now collector items; World War I is a page of history; but, 59 years later, Mrs. Francis is still teaching boys and girls in Sunday School in First Baptist Church, DeRidder.

"They're live creatures, you know," says the spry, intense and bubbling 93-year-old Mrs. Francis, whose love and attention for children are not limited to the Sunday School.

"I always speak to every child I meet on the street," she says. "Some of them look at me like I'm crazy. They're not used to having adults talk to them--especially on the street like that."

Mrs. Francis's sweet, grandmotherly ways camouflage the intensity that may well be the center spring of all her accomplishments. She is so intent on getting things done today that talking about yesterdays isn't one of her favorite activities.

She had six children, the youngest of which is 56. "I taught them all in Sunday School," she says. "They were just members of the class, and I think it's fine for parents to teach their children in Sunday School." Her husband died 36 years ago.

When Mrs. Francis was asked if she ever had a bad experience teaching, she could not think of any. There's no way anyone is going to get Mrs. Francis to say children are anything but great.

"I've learned what one doesn't do, the other one will. And girls are as mischievous as boys," she says. "But I've found that some do things so someone will love them. Others are restless. Some just want you to pay attention to them. I love them all."

Mrs. Francis walks up to three miles each day, unless the weather "is just too bad." A lot of that walking is to distribute the "barrels" of cookies she makes, taking some by the church office almost every day.

Three years ago Mrs. Francis was struck by a car. Doctors thought she might not walk again, but her intensity changed things.

"I was out in three months. As soon as I got out, I was back at the church," she says. "That's where I wanted to be."

Mrs. Francis is just as determined that she is going to continue helping in the children's department.

"I tell them I'm not old enough to go to the TEL class," she laughed. "My friends have done everything but force me, but I'm still here."