



BAPTIST PRESS

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Court Takes One, Declines Four Other Religion Cases

By Stan Hasty

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court announced it will decide if a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses sect can draw unemployment benefits after quitting his job at an armaments factory on religious grounds.

At the same time, the high court declined to review four other religion cases dealing with church property, a property deed to a church-related college, family discipline on religious grounds, and the religious rights of a prisoner.

By agreeing to hear the Jehovah's Witness case, the justices will decide if Eddie C. Thomas, a worker at an armaments plant in Indiana, qualifies for unemployment compensation benefits after he quit his job claiming that his religion forbids making instruments for war.

A state administrative referee, while not questioning the sincerity of Thomas' religious beliefs, ruled that he had not given "good cause" to receive the benefits. The state Employment Security Review Board agreed but was later reversed by a state court. That decision, in turn, was reversed by Indiana's Supreme Court, setting the stage for the appeal to the nation's high court.

Meanwhile, the court refused to schedule for argument a case from Macon, Ga., involving a long property struggle within the Vineville Presbyterian Church. The court ruled last year that a majority of the church's members, who had earlier voted to withdraw from the parent United Presbyterian Church, owned the property.

The so-called "loyal minority," however, has kept the legal battle alive, noting in papers filed with the high court that its decision last July 2 left open the possibility that the Georgia Supreme Court might be obliged to reverse itself if Presbyterian church polity required property rights in such disputes to revert to the denomination.

The Georgia high court, after rehearing the case last fall, came down with the same position adopted earlier, declaring that "neutral principles of law" govern even church property disputes in the state.

The denomination has argued throughout the long battle that Presbyterian church polity has sought a balance between a congregational and hierarchical form of government and that the church has internal judicial machinery to settle disputes. It accused the Georgia Supreme Court of ignoring the "admonition" of the U.S. Supreme Court to consider church polity in determining the "true congregation."

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Because of the Vineville dispute and others like it, the denomination has established a study commission to determine new wording in legal documents which would give the body undisputed property rights in such cases. Such automatic transferral of local properties is enjoyed by more clearly hierarchical church bodies, such as the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

The high court likewise declined to review another Georgia Supreme Court ruling involving a deed of trust to Ambassador College, an institution owned and operated by Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God.

Sally J. Goetzke claimed that her aged mother, a Georgia resident, was unduly pressured to sign over a property deed to school officials, whom she also accused of fraud. The college refused, however, to answer the charges when the case came to trial. The trial court revoked the trust agreement and ruled that the property belonged to Goetzke, the legal heir.

Attorneys for the school, citing the First Amendment, argued that the Georgia courts could not force disclosure of financial information sought during the proceeding.

The justices also refused to disturb a series of New York state court rulings against a fundamentalist minister, James Roy, convicted of child abuse in the beating of his teen-age daughter.

Roy maintained that he administered corporal punishment to the daughter, Shirley, because he believes in biblical inerrancy and because the Bible commands parents to use bodily punishment as a means of discipline. He said the girl had rejected the Christian faith, twice ran away from home, and associated with persons whose lifestyles were unacceptable.

Three state courts disagreed with the Norwich minister, however, ruling that the state has a "compelling interest" in protecting children from unreasonable corporal punishment.

In a case brought by a Missouri prison superintendent, the high court sided, at least temporarily, with an inmate at the state's Training Center for Men in Moberly who is seeking a hearing on his charge that prison officials have unconstitutionally denied his religious freedom.

The inmate, Clovis Carl Green Jr., claims to be a minister of the Human Awareness Universal Life Church, a group which he says believes in long hair and beards, conjugal visits, and banquets on religious holidays. Green's suit against superintendent Carl White also asked for \$1 million in damages and was dismissed two years ago as "frivolous" by a trial judge.

On appeal, however, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered an evidentiary hearing in the case. The Supreme Court's action refusing to hear the case means that Green will get his wish for a new day in court. Attorneys for the State of Missouri expressed frustration over Green's demands, noting that in less than five years of imprisonment on a rape conviction, the inmate has filed more than 500 suits.

Valentine Begins Role On Presidential Commission

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The President's Commission For A National Agenda for the Eighties has begun its work to identify and examine the most critical public policy challenges of the 1980s, according to a Southern Baptist leader appointed to the commission by President Carter.

Foy Valentine, executive director of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, said the 50-person commission will prepare recommendations for the president and Congress by early 1981.

The commission, chaired by William McGill, president of Columbia University, includes persons from a wide spectrum of American life, including at least three from the religious community. They are Valentine, theologian Martin Marty and Edmond Pellegrino, president of Catholic University.

"The president's willingness to include the perspective of the religious community indicates an obvious desire to have strong input for moral values and ideals on the agenda of our nation," Valentine said.

White House Executive Order 12168, which set up the commission, says, "It shall examine issues related to the capacity for effective federal governance, the role of private institutions in meeting public needs, and underlying social and economic trends as these issues bear on our public policy challenges in the 1980s."

The commission, which grew out of President Carter's domestic summit at Camp David last summer, will review the following areas, the executive order said:

--"Underlying trends or developments within our society, such as the changing structure of our economy, the persistence of inflationary forces, demands on our natural environment, and demographic shifts within our population that will shape public choices in the 1980s;

--"Opportunities to enhance social justice and economic well-being for all our people in the 1980s;

--"The role of private institutions, including the non-profit and voluntary sectors, in meeting basic human needs and aspirations in the future.

--"Defining the role of the public sector, and financing its responsibilities in the 1980s.

--"Impediments to building policy consensus, both within government--the executive branch, Congress, state and local government--and within the nation as a whole."

The commission, which has an office and staff in Washington, will serve through Feb. 15, 1981.



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UPDATE

Mission Service Corps'
First Volunteers To Stay

By Erich Bridges

MENOMONIE, Wis. (BP)--Mission Service Corps, Southern Baptists' ambitious plan to place 5,000 volunteers on mission fields for one or two-year terms, is now just over two years old.

Paying their own expenses, or supported by churches and individuals, 200 volunteers currently serve in the United States under the program, and nearly a hundred more minister overseas.

Elgin and Jean Lee, the first MSC volunteers appointed, arrived in Menomonie, Wis., in October of 1977, to rescue River Heights Baptist Church, a tiny congregation struggling for survival with no pastor and a massive building debt. Lee had been a Missouri pastor and for 15 years directed Southern Baptist student work there.

After two vicious winters living in the church fellowship hall, the Lees have arranged with the help of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and some Texas Baptist churches, to stay in Wisconsin though their two-year Mission Service Corps term is over.

"It hasn't been easy, but I feel really needed here," says Lee, a tall, gentle man with unruly hair and soft words. "They had no problem replacing me in Missouri, but this church had no one to lead it, and nothing financially to offer anyone. It would have died."

River Heights Church still labors under debt, but with a corps of fifteen members and stable leadership, it's alive and kicking, and strong enough to sponsor a new Baptist mission in nearby Eau Claire, where the Lees are to move.

"Considering what's happened here, the sky's the limit over there," Lee says, because Eau Claire has six times the population. He'll share preaching duties in Eau Claire and Menomonie with a bi-vocational insurance-man-pastor.

Sunday services frequently attract many of the Lees' new friends from the nearby University of Wisconsin-Stout campus. Last year the Lees directed their longstanding student work skills to start a Baptist Student Union on the Stout campus, home of 7,500 students. Saturday night BSU meetings, directed by Jean, have drawn as many as 40 students, half of which often are internationals.

On a broader front, the Lees have deeply involved themselves in the expansion of student work over the entire Minnesota-Wisconsin area, which encompasses 141 accredited colleges and more than half a million students.

Lee chairs the Student Work Committee for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Southern Baptist Fellowship. In that capacity he's helped to recruit contacts for ten new BSU's in the past two years, with twelve more planned before 1983.

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"It's a privilege to work with the Lees," says John Nance, student work director for the two-state fellowship. "Their experience with students is deep and longstanding, and that's vital to us, because reaching students is one of the most effective ways of building strong, indigenous Baptist churches in this area."

Lee also serves on the administrative committee, which considers all important policy matters for the two-state fellowship.

Finally, the Lees intend to sponsor another new mission, this time in Chippewa County, home of 120,000 people and zero Baptist churches.

"Man, this is where the action is!" enthuses Lee, standing outside River Heights Church and gazing to the surrounding countryside. "We're on the cutting edge of missions here. The needs are tremendous, and the doors are open. I thank God that Mission Service Corps put us in touch with them."

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Stephenson, Pentecost Elected To Offices

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Two Virginia Baptist leaders were named to top offices at annual meetings of the Association of Baptist State Executive Directors and the Southern Baptist Press Association here.

Richard L. Stephenson of the Baptist General Association of Virginia was elected president of the state executive directors group, and Julian L. Pentecost, editor of Virginia's Religious Herald, became president of the press association.

Other officers in the state executive directors group are Joe L. Ingram of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, vice president, and Robert Wilson of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, secretary-treasurer.

Don McGregor, editor of Mississippi's Baptist Record, was elected president-elect of the press association, and Bob Terry, editor of Missouri's Word and Way, was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

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(BP) photos of each group of officers mailed to state Baptist newspapers.

Theodore Adams Critically Ill

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Theodore F. Adams, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Richmond, was listed in critical condition in a Richmond hospital after becoming ill on Sunday, Feb. 24.

Mrs. Betsy Thompson, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Adams, said, "Please put dad on your prayer list," as the family kept watch and waited for medical reports.

The 81-year-old former president of the Baptist World Alliance was reported unconscious, but with stable vital signs and reduced fever.

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