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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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August 26, 1981

81-133

**Damages Against Board  
Excessive, Cut by Judge**

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)**--Damages awarded by a jury to a former employee of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board have been reduced from \$400,000 to \$60,000.

In reducing compensatory damages from \$300,000 to \$50,000 and punitive damages from \$100,000 to \$10,000, Circuit Court Judge Joe C. Loser said the original judgment of the jury "exceeds the range of reasonableness."

The jury verdict followed a two-week trial in July on a \$1.5 million lawsuit filed in 1977 by Don Burnett, 42, a former board personnel placement consultant.

During the trial, Loser directed verdicts in favor of the board on five of the six allegations: assault and battery, wrongful discharge, gross negligence, outrageous conduct and false arrest and imprisonment.

The jury made its award on the remaining allegation of defamation.

The suit arose from a chain of incidents which began in July of 1976 when Burnett went to board President Grady C. Cothen to express concern that certain board employees might be involved in massive conspiracies to defraud the board of funds and that some officials were engaged in sexual misconduct.

During the trial, Burnett, now an insurance salesman, testified he had no concrete facts on which to base his concerns.

After being told Burnett was carrying a gun for his protection, Cothen became concerned and asked Burnett to see a psychiatrist. The physician, testimony indicated, felt Burnett possessed the likelihood of harm to himself or others, and advised having police pick up Burnett for an examination by another psychiatrist.

Burnett was picked up Aug. 4, 1976, and taken to a hospital. He was released after conversations between his personal physician and the psychiatrist who was to perform the second examination.

Burnett, who did not return to work at the BSSB, was terminated Nov. 4, 1976, after failing to provide medical evidence concerning his health.

During an Aug. 14, 1981, hearing on the BSSB motion to direct the defamation verdict in favor of the board, Loser upheld the jury verdict but said he felt damages were excessive.

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In his memorandum to attorneys involved, Loser reduced the damage award, and said that if Burnett accepts the \$60,000 award within 15 days, he will deny the board motion for a new trial. However, if Burnett rejects the reduction, Loser said he will grant a new trial.

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Students Urged To Study,  
Believe and Apply the Bible

By David F. Haywood

Baptist Press  
8/26/81

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Disciplined efforts to understand and apply biblical truths will make a dramatic difference in their lives, more than 900 college students were told.

Duke K. McCall, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., and Peter Rhea Jones, pastor of First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., affirmed the inspiration of Scriptures and the need for Bible study in addresses to launch the 1981-82 nationwide campus Bible study emphasis sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's National Student Ministries.

"If we believe in the inspiration of the Bible, we need to believe and read all of it," said Jones. "If we believe in the inspiration of Scripture, let's preach all of it, even the part that doesn't go down too well."

He said Christians should read the Bible as authoritative and allow it to speak to them. "You give power to the laity when you give them the Bible and they read it," said Jones. "The Bible gives us coping power to speak to our lives and make a difference."

McCall said everyone has his own personal understanding of the meaning of the Scriptures, an understanding limited in scope and which can never be equated with all of God's truth available in the Bible.

He urged the students to undertake continual efforts to expand their understanding of biblical truth.

Referring to controversies about the Bible among Southern Baptists, McCall said groups are divided by their understandings about the Bible, not by the Bible itself.

"I wish I had the original manuscripts," said McCall. "But even if you had them in your hand and had to understand them with what you have in your skull, error would creep in."

"It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that the word of God will become truth," said McCall.

Noted Jones: "The Christian has no reason to fear the truth. Go for it and learn."

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**-- FEATURES**  
produced by Baptist Press

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Former Catholic Sister  
Now 'Baptist Nun'

By Anne and John Brackin

MANILA, Philippines (BP) — After 14 years as a Catholic nun, Filipina Nina Cuevas discovered she did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, as business manager for the Philippine Baptist radio-television ministry, she is becoming known throughout the islands as the "Baptist nun."

"It's easy and simple," she tells other nuns who have questions about their faith. "I asked God to come into my life and to forgive all my sins. Now I am very sure that I'm a child of God. He is now living in me."

But that assurance was many years in coming.

The youngest of 12 children, Cuevas was raised in a strong Catholic environment where Protestantism is considered sinful. In school she learned to respect her nun teachers as women of wisdom, prestige and authority and they told her that anything not Catholic was sinful and to be feared.

One night a Protestant evangelistic team came to her barrio, but the villagers drove them out. Why, wondered Cuevas, when they were speaking about God's word? And why was her father the only member of her family allowed to read the Bible?

Rather than press her questions, which she knew would be interpreted as heresy against the Catholic church, she learned to conform and dedicated herself to becoming a nun.

After earning an education degree, she taught school two years then entered a convent. She taught school in the Philippines for seven years, then went as a missionary to Santiago, Chile.

In language school Cuevas met a British missionary, Pauline English, a former nun, who told her of a personal relationship with Christ. "I was so ashamed of myself," Cuevas says. "In my religious garb I had not had the boldness to share Jesus Christ."

The long-buried questions surfaced and with them the search for answers. She began reading the New Testament and became convicted that being good, obedient and sacrificial was not enough.

On March 23, 1974, Nina Cuevas asked God to forgive her and invited Jesus into her heart.

Her experience led Cuevas to write Rome, requesting secular clothing and freedom to attend other Christian church services. Rome ordered her to return to the Philippines immediately. But her local superior arranged another year for her in Chile until a new school registrar and director of a feeding center could replace her.

She returned home, eager to see family and friends, yet knowing they would disapprove of her decision and that it would be difficult to explain the change in her life.

At home, Cuevas began listening to the Baptist Hour program on radio and enrolled in the Bible correspondence course. Pauline English had recommended that she contact the Philippine Baptist mission when she got home.

Through the correspondence course Cuevas met Southern Baptist missionaries Marge and Howard Olive, who direct the radio-television ministry, and they took her to several Baptist churches in Manila.

In 1978 she was baptized into membership of Village Baptist Church in Manila. She has attended the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, studying for a master of religious education degree, and teaches a young people's Sunday School class.

Once again she is involved in religious work. But this time she knows where she stands and what she believes.

"I am very sure that I'm a child of God," she says firmly. "He is now living in me."

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Anne and John Brackin are Southern Baptist missionaries in the Philippines.  
 (BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

HMB Staffer Returns To China  
 For Father's 90th Birthday

by Jim Newton

Baptist Press  
 8/26/81

ATLANTA (BP)—After 33 years of separation, Peter Chen went home to Shanghai, China, to celebrate his father's 90th birthday.

In Shanghai, he was surprised to find not only his father, but also his hometown church and pastor "in amazingly good health." All had changed, but were full of life and vitality, Chen said.

Chen, assistant director of the interfaith witness department for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, left China in 1948 to study for the ministry at Wayland Baptist College, Plainview, Texas, and had not been home since.

"The first thing my father said to me was, 'What happened to all your hair?'" laughed the 56-year-old Chen. He was only 23 when his father, Te-ming Chen, had last seen him.

There were moments of tears, joy, solemnity and laughter as more than 100 friends and family members, including two sons from the United States, gathered at a Shanghai restaurant to celebrate the elder Chen's birthday.

On the first Sunday he was in Shanghai, Chen went with his family to the interdenominational church where his former pastor, Charles Chi, is one of five Protestant ministers.

More than 2,000 persons packed the seats and jammed the aisles while several hundred others stood outside. Chen said he was amazed at the vitality of the congregation. "The people were so sincere—it came from their hearts when they sang," he said.

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People started standing in line at 7:30 a.m. to get seats when the church doors opened at 9 a.m. Worship services started at 10:30 after an hour-long music training program to teach people, especially youth who had never attended worship, to sing hymns. Chen estimated almost two-thirds of the congregation was young people.

Shanghai, the world's largest city with more than 12 million population, has only three Protestant churches, and all are packed for worship each Sunday. The church Chen attended reopened in December 1980, after more than two decades of repression.

Christians in China are still reluctant to show their faith publicly, Chen observed. "I detected among the people a fear--and that's not a strong enough word--about openly praying or expressing their faith in public." Later, he said "terrified" might be a better word.

His own father refused to talk about the way Christians, including his own family, were treated during the cultural revolution and rule of the "Gang of Four."

Chen learned that his father and other family members were forced to shave their heads and parade publicly in the streets so everyone would know they were Christians and had relatives in America. When Chen asked his father if they were ever put in jail, his father refused to reply, saying only "No more mention of this."

Before the revolution, his father and five others owned a department store which was taken over by the government. The large house his father owned was made into a commune for seven families. Only one room was assigned to Te-ming Chen and his wife.

Although Chen said he was greatly encouraged by the vitality of the church in China, he observed "It will be a long time before the churches can recapture the spirit they had before the revolution."

Chen doubts American missionaries will be able to return to China, but is highly optimistic about Chinese Christians returning to their homeland to become missionaries to their own people.

"The answer is not Americans witnessing to Chinese, but Chinese witnessing to other Chinese," Chen insisted.