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March 5, 1984

84-36

Supreme Court Upholds Public Nativity Displays

By Stan Hasty

WASHINGTON (BP)--Cities and towns may erect Christmas nativity scenes without violating the Constitution, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled March 5.

In a 5-4 decision, the high court upheld the practice of including scenes depicting the birth of Christ as part of larger Christmas displays under sponsorship of municipal governments, ruling such a practice is not inconsistent with the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion.

At issue in one of the term's major church-state conflicts was a 40-year-old Pawtucket, R.I., tradition of erecting a large Christmas display in the heart of the city that included a Santa Claus house, reindeer pulling Santa's sleigh, candy-striped poles, a Christmas tree, carolers, cutout figures representing seasonal characters, a large "Seasons Greetings" banner and the creche.

Two lower federal courts agreed earlier inclusion of the creche violated the Constitution.

But the nation's high court, in an opinion filed by Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, narrowly disagreed, citing numerous examples of permissible intermingling of the sacred and the secular. Burger relied heavily on a decision last term upholding the practice of state-paid legislative chaplains in which he held the nation's founders did not intend to divorce religion from public life.

He also enumerated other national traditions acknowledging God, including an annual day of thanksgiving, the national motto "In God We Trust," the phrase "One nation under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, and religious paintings in publicly owned art galleries. He added: "There are countless other illustrations of the Government's acknowledgment of our religious heritage and governmental sponsorship of graphic manifestations of that heritage."

Recalling Thomas Jefferson's image of a wall of separation between church and state in a letter to a committee of the Danbury (Conn.) Baptist Association in 1802, Burger said while "the metaphor has served as a reminder the Establishment Clause forbids an established church or anything approaching it...the metaphor itself is not a wholly accurate description of the practical aspects of the relationship that in fact exists between church and state."

Pawtucket's Christmas display, including the creche, did not violate the Establishment Clause, Burger held, because it had a secular as well as a religious purpose, did not have the "primary effect" of advancing religion, and did not involve "excessive entanglement" between church and state.

That three-part test was first applied by the court in a 1970 ruling and has served since then as the litmus test for Establishment Clause disputes. In his Pawtucket decision, Burger called the three-part test "useful" but not mandatory.

Joining Burger in the majority were justices Byron R. White, Lewis F. Powell Jr., William H. Rehnquist and Sandra Day O'Connor.

In a dissenting opinion that ran nearly twice the length of Burger's ruling, senior justice William J. Brennan Jr. scored the majority position as contrary to "our remarkable and precious religious diversity as a nation."

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By upholding public sponsorship of a sectarian religious symbol, Brennan said, "the prestige of the government has been conferred on the beliefs associated with the creche." That means, he continued, "the effect on minority religious groups, as well as on those who may reject all religion, is to convey the message their views are not similarly worthy of public recognition or entitled to public support.

"It was precisely this sort of religious chauvinism the Establishment Clause was intended forever to prohibit," Brennan concluded.

Justices Thurgood Marshall, Harry A. Blackmun and John Paul Stevens joined Brennan's dissent.

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Baptist College Leaders
Satisfied With Court Ruling

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
3/5/84

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist college and university presidents expressed general satisfaction with the Feb. 28 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that private colleges and universities must comply with anti-sex discrimination laws.

The court unanimously ruled the U.S. Department of Education was within its rights to take Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (Pell Grants) from students at Grove City (Pa.) College because the college refused to submit forms indicating it does not discriminate against women.

Grove City College, once affiliated with the United Presbyterian Church but now privately owned and operated, had argued it need not file the form because the college received no direct federal aid.

The court ruled, however, financial grants to students amount to subsidies to the college, thus placing the college under anti-sex discrimination laws.

But the court also ruled in a 6-3 vote schools do not have to show anti-sex discrimination compliance in all programs, just in those receiving federal aid.

According to Lewis Nobles, president of Mississippi College, Clinton, Miss., the issue of "program specific" is what gave denominational colleges the greatest concern.

"Finally the Supreme Court has recognized what the law (Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1972) said all along--that it contains program specific limitations," Nobles said.

Program specificity, according to Nobles, means the government can only monitor programs which directly receive federal money. "Under this Supreme Court decision, a college, whose only federal income comes from students receiving federal financial assistance, could only be found in violation of sex discrimination in the administration of the financial aid program," he said.

Nobles said Mississippi College has been filing the required forms "under protest." He pointed out, however, the college adds the statement "we do not consider that we have waived any rights or privileges that should come to Mississippi College as a private denominational college."

Daniel R. Grant, president of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., echoed Nobles' sentiments. "The more significant part of the court decision for Baptist schools is the narrowing of Title IX jurisdiction to the specific program receiving federal aid."

Grant added, "Ouachita, as well as most Baptist institutions, has been filing the statement of assurance of nondiscrimination on the basis of sex, but with the clear reservation either expressed or implied, that it is under the context of the First Amendment guarantee of free expression of religious faith."

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Mark Hopkins, president of Anderson (S.C.) College, a two-year school, said he was not upset by the ruling. "We had hoped not to get caught up in the federal bureaucracy, but there is now no doubt we have to file the forms."

He said Anderson has been submitting the forms and it "is really not a problem."

Bob R. Agee, president of Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Okla., too was not surprised by the ruling. "The decision to link human rights legislation with financial aid programs is a natural connection. We don't mind filing the forms because our students benefit," he said.

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SBC Leaders Outline
Prerequisites For Reaching Ethnics By Everett Hullum

Baptist Press
3/5/84

LOS ANGELES (BP)--The growing pluralism of American society demands Southern Baptists work more aggressively to develop ethnic churches, missions leaders told more than 200 persons attending the 27th annual language missions leadership conference sponsored by the SBC Home Mission Board.

Development of these churches will be "determined by the denomination's ability and willingness" to reproduce its programs in the cultural, linguistic and socio-religious backgrounds of the people the conference participants were told.

Those were the key points made by Oscar Romo, director of language missions for the Home Mission Board, and William Pinson, executive director of Baptist General Convention of Texas, in speeches to the more than 200 Southern Baptist Convention mission leaders attending the 27th annual Language Missions Leadership Conference in Los Angeles.

Romo pointed out the convention had added 345 new language-culture units (churches, missions, Bible studies or preaching points) annually for the past five years. In addition, work has been initiated with at least one new ethnic group every year since 1971.

Southern Baptists have 4,000 ethnic congregations with more than 300,000 participants. Yet church growth among ethnics is not keeping pace with ethnic population growth.

In 13 of the nation's 20 largest cities, Romo noted, ethnic/racial minorities comprise more than 50 percent of the total population, yet "Southern Baptists have not done well in evangelizing the urban population." Additionally, recent studies report more than 600 languages are spoken within the United States.

But projections for the rest of the decade indicate only a 10 percent SBC growth rate, with denominational language missions increasing by 4,574 new units and seven new ethnic groups. This, Romo indicated, would not keep pace with immigration and population growth among ethnic Americans.

"The decades of the '80s and '90s will become the vanguard of pluralism in the United States," Romo said. "Southern Baptists are faced with the most complex challenge in the history of Christianity" as they work "to share the gospel in the language and contextual understanding of the people."

Pinson suggested four areas in which Southern Baptists need to concentrate if they are to provide opportunities for worship/witness to the United States' burgeoning ethnic population:

(1) Leadership. Pinson called for an "explosion of leaders" from among ethnic groups. Believing "God will bring forth" people with leadership ability, Pinson urged Southern Baptists to prepare to train them to meet the need for "thousands of new churches for the hundreds of thousands of lost people of all ethnic groups."

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(2) Literature. Admitting "we don't have adequate ethnic materials, but we have the resources," Pinson said those concerned about language missions must "pray, work and lobby" to see literature is produced to meet the needs of ethnic Southern Baptists. Through the Home Mission Board and state conventions, Southern Baptists work with more than 85 language/culture groups, but less than 30 percent of these have materials in their own language.

(3) Understanding. "We have a denomination that is illiterate to America's ethnicity," Pinson said. Charging "we have to understand the makeup of this nation to know what is needed to meet the challenge of language missions," Pinson said no Southern Baptist pastor/leader should come through an SBC seminary unaware of American pluralism, nor should any Southern Baptist go through "our churches without understanding the challenge of the mosaic of our ethnic population."

(4) Linkage. Realizing it is impossible for language missions to be done solely by one agency, institution or individual, Pinson urged Southern Baptists on all levels to join in the task of language missions.

Such actions won't come, Pinson said, until Southern Baptists "respect one another" despite differences in culture, language and background. He admitted total understanding of another's position or circumstances may be impossible, but respect can bridge the gaps and create a climate in which "I can understand how much I need you because unless you place your life beside mine, I will be incomplete, unless we are side-by-side, we will never do all that is necessary to reach our land with the gospel."

Despite individual uniqueness, he concluded, "our faith is greater than our differences. We are separate, distinct, different, but when we come together in Christ, we are able to function in harmony and unity."

Romo added, "The world is coming to America. Our denomination must respond positively to the opportunity to imbue the national mosaic with the redeeming love of Jesus Christ."

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Eighty-Nine And Going Strong,
North Carolinian Enjoys Her Greek

Baptist Press
3/5/84

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A 65-year-old desire to read her New Testament in Greek continues as strong as ever for Mrs. Tom E. Walters Sr.

Mrs. Walters graduated from the former Woman's Missionary Union Training School at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., in 1921. Today at age 89, she still does Greek exegesis three or four hours a day.

Mrs. Walters, a resident of Ridgecrest, N.C., who splits her time between there and her hometown of Warrenton, N.C., said her interest in Greek came after she graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1917.

"I was in my second year of teaching and felt God was calling me into full time Christian ministry. It was most unusual and I did not understand it but it seemed God was telling me I would be a preacher's wife," she explained. "I said to myself, 'If that is to be my calling, I want to be the best to be found.' With that calling also came my desire to read my New Testament in Greek--my family thought I was nuts."

She enrolled in the WMU Training School (which later became the Carver School of Missions and Social Work) in 1919.

While it was separate from the seminary, women students studying there were allowed to take classes at the seminary.

"Women at the school were not allowed to date except on Thursday nights. Even then, dates had to be out by 10 p.m., she recalled. "There was no lingering. We couldn't speak to men in our classes or in the hallways at Norton Hall either. We could walk with them to church Sunday nights but not at any other time."

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Mrs. Walters said she encountered A.T. Robertson, professor of Greek and New Testament at Southern from 1890-1934, at her first get-together party for new students.

"I told Dr. Robertson I wanted to study Greek under him and finish his course," she recalled. "He said that was fine, but if I did, I'd be the first woman he'd ever had do so."

Mrs. Maud R. McLure, training school principal, didn't believe women should study Greek, but Mrs. Walters studied for two years under William Hersey Davis, Robertson's special protegee and assistant.

After completing her two years of training at the ~~WNU~~ school, she married Tom Walters.

Her husband had two years of classical Greek at Wake Forest and she had the two years of New Testament Greek so both enrolled in the same Greek class with Robertson.

"Those were golden years in Southern's history," she added. "There were Dr. Robertson and Davis, E.Y. Mullins, W.O. Carver and John R. Sampey. I had Dr. Mullins for theology. He was a very dignified man, easy to talk to and such a brain. They all were."

In 1923, her husband completed his Th.M. degree. She had had all the classes he had except Hebrew, but since women weren't allowed to matriculate then, didn't receive a diploma.

"That's a regret in my life," she said. "I did all the work the preachers did. I wish I could have gotten credit for those four years of hard work."

After seminary days, the Walters returned to North Carolina where Mrs. Walters worked as educational director in every church her husband had and "raised our children. It was impossible for me to keep up with my Greek studies like Tom did."

In 1957, Mrs. Walters' husband died.

Arthritis limited her activities in 1974, Mrs. Walters said, but she remained busy reading, teaching Sunday school and knitting.

"I told myself I was sick of that last August," she added. "I needed to find something better to do." That's when she reopened her Greek texts.

"I went to spend the winter with my daughter and took Dr. Davis' Greek grammar with me," she said. "I began studying through the grammar again, learning vocabularies, reading the Greek sentences, writing English into Greek and studying construction. By November I felt ready to begin translating."

With a good lexicon given to her by John W. Carlton, former associate professor of preaching at Southern Seminary, Mrs. Walters said she began studying three to four hours daily.

"I study just for my satisfaction," she said. "I hope to live long enough to go back and read the New Testament more readily."

"Reading Greek," she said, "is an emotional experience for me. I have a peculiar feeling of nearness to Christ when I read the gospels. For me it's wonderful therapy and very rewarding."

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CORRECTION--In (BP) news analysis, "Most Grove City Coverage Missed Case's Main Point" mailed 3/2/84, please delete second sentence of eighth paragraph: "And the decision applies only to private schools rather than to public institutions."

Also, in (BP) story "Musician Losing Sight Seeks God's Surprise," mailed 2/29/84, please delete the word "her" in first sentence of seventh paragraph.

Thanks, Baptist Press



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