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87-27

Synagogue Seeks Protection Under Civil Rights Statute

By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)—A Silver Spring, Md., synagogue asked the nation's highest court Feb. 25 to apply a 120-year-old federal civil rights law designed for protection of racial minorities to other groups victimized by racially motivated acts.

Patricia A. Brannan, attorney for the Shaare Tefila Congregation, argued that while Jews are not a distinct racial group, the federal statute should be interpreted so as to provide relief from discriminatory acts based on the belief that Jews are a separate and inferior race.

Brannan contended the actions of eight men charged with spray-painting anti-Semitic slogans and pro-Nazi symbols on the synagogue in 1982 were so motivated. Under Maryland law, one of the accused men was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison for destruction of property, four were convicted of vandalism-related offenses and three were not prosecuted.

In a separate 1984 civil suit filed against the men on the basis of the federal race discrimination law, the congregation sought \$3,000 in real and punitive damages. When the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the synagogue could not bring the suit on that basis, attorneys for the congregation appealed to the Supreme Court.

Arguing that the Congress that drafted the 1866 Civil Rights Act "had an open-ended concept of what would be covered," Brannan said the statute should be applied to any racially motivated incident of violence regardless of the victims' actual membership in a distinct racial group.

But Deborah T. Garren, a Baltimore attorney representing one of the men charged with defacing the synagogue, said the high court should not stretch the race discrimination statute to cover other forms of discrimination, including religious discrimination.

Garren argued the law, which gave non-whites a number of rights previously reserved for white citizens, was designed not "to root out all forms of discrimination," but rather to protect newly freed slaves.

While calling the defacing of the synagogue an "egregious wrong" that "cries out for a remedy," Garren said adequate state remedies exist and application of the federal statute would be inappropriate.

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Antonin Scalia questioned Brannan about potential problems in the application of her theory that such court decisions should be based on the intent of the discriminator rather than on the racial distinction of the victim. Rehnquist and Scalia pressed for a clear definition of "racially motivated," while O'Connor said she did not see anything in the statute's legislative history "relative to the sophistication of the discriminator."

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Supreme Court To Review
Death Penalty For Juveniles

By Stan Hasty

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WASHINGTON (BP)—The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to decide whether imposing the death penalty on juvenile murderers amounts to a form of cruel and unusual punishment forbidden by the Constitution.

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Accepted for review during the high court's 1987-88 term was the case of convicted killer William Wayne Thompson of Oklahoma, who was 15 when he and three others murdered his former brother-in-law, Charles Keene. Of the four, only Thompson was under legal age. The four claimed they killed Keene because he physically abused his wife, Vicki, the sister of Thompson and one of the other murderers.

After being convicted for his role in the 1983 killing, Thompson was sentenced to death and sent to await execution at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester.

His attorney, Harry F. Tepker Jr., who teaches in the College of Law at the University of Oklahoma, had asked the high court to review the case in part because only Oklahoma currently has a juvenile -- Thompson -- on death row. In his written statement seeking the review, Tepker also noted that since 1976, when the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty for first-degree murder, only three juveniles have been executed.

While 36 states now have death penalty statutes, only nine permit the execution of juveniles under age 18.

Tepker argued further the court should review Thompson's case because imposing the death penalty on "a child of 15 ... offends American traditions of justice." He added, "Capital punishment of juveniles is arbitrary, freakish punishment that makes no measurable contribution to the goals of punishment."

Arguing such determinations should be left to state legislatures, Oklahoma Assistant Attorney General David W. Lee asked the high court not to review Thompson's sentence. He argued nothing in the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment "implies that a person's chronological age should be anything more than a factor for the sentencing authority to consider when imposing sentence."

Lee also cited the "great variance between maturity levels of individual adolescents" as a further reason the Supreme Court should refrain from disturbing Thompson's death sentence.

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Ethnics First To Pledge
Support For 1990 Revivals

By Joe Westbury

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ATLANTA (BP)—In separate meetings in Atlanta and New York, Southern Baptist ethnic groups have taken the lead in pledging their support for the next round of simultaneous revivals scheduled for 1990 in Baptist churches across the nation.

Leaders and editors of the 17 ethnic fellowships recently met at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for the first time to study methods of mass communication of the gospel to their language groups.

As a result of the three-day meeting, a growing network of ethnic newspapers will be utilized to unite the groups around Bold Mission Thrust goals of evangelizing the nation for Christ, said Oscar Romo, director of the language missions division for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

The pact signifies a developing relationship between the ethnic groups and the evangelism division of the Atlanta-based agency, explained Romo.

The ethnic leaders suggested methods of establishing 18,220 new language mission units by the year 2000 as well as equipping 31,139 additional leaders in 295 new ethnic leadership development centers. Currently 6,500 units exist in the nation, Romo said, while 65 centers have trained 1,300 persons.

The ethnic leaders also studied ways of translating and publishing materials through their newspapers so Southern Baptist ministries can reach more language groups than before, Romo said.

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Bobby Sunderland, director of the direct evangelism division for the Home Mission Board, outlined a six-fold plan to involve ethnics through such methods as providing simultaneous revival materials in their newspapers and equipping their leaders in personal evangelism and revival preparation. The strategy, to be implemented in stages during the next five years, will climax in launching new ethnic churches from results of the revivals.

In a recent meeting in New York, state language missions directors followed the example set by the ethnic leaders by also pledging their support to the simultaneous revival effort.

The national revivals in 1990 will seek to include that major segment of Southern Baptists who largely were untouched by the 1986 revivals, Romo noted.

The Home Mission Board's evangelism section recently announced plans for the second set of simultaneous revivals similar to the Good News America revivals of 1986. Called "Good News America: Here's Hope," the revivals will be coordinated from March 18 to April 29 of 1990.

"Ethnic fellowships are one of the keys to reaching America through these revivals," Sunderland explained. "We may sometimes think Southern Baptists are doing a good job of evangelizing America's ethnics, but we have not yet begun to scratch the surface."

Sunderland said the revival emphasis was only one example of ways ethnics and the evangelism section will work together in the future.

In personal evangelism, for example, the section is beginning to translate materials in various languages for use by the fellowships. "The door is wide open for personal and mass evangelism among America's ethnic groups. The opportunities are plentiful and are growing every day," he added.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

SBC Language Missions
Workers Receive Awards

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NEW YORK (BP)—Southern Baptist language missions workers have been cited for outstanding accomplishments by the language missions division of the denomination's Home Mission Board.

Division Director Oscar Romo presented the awards at a banquet in New York City during the board's 30th annual language missions leadership conference.

Five individuals received the division's Kaleidoscopic Award for outstanding achievement with minimal resources.

Stanley K. Smith, director of language missions and stewardship of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey, was honored for his accomplishment in beginning new language missions in the Northeast.

Harold Hitt, director of missions for the Northwest Baptist Convention, received an award for his work in refugee resettlement.

Hiram F. Duffer, language missions program leader for the Puerto Rico Baptist Association, was honored for his work with the deaf population in that American territory.

Elias D. Pantoja, former director of language missions for the Missouri Baptist Convention, received the award for his work with internationals in Missouri. Pantoja recently joined the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., as a national consultant with student ministries.

Manuel Alonso, language program director for the Baptist Convention of New York, was recognized for his accomplishments in ethnic leadership development.

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In a related presentation, the state language missions directors honored Merry Purvis for 18 years service to the language missions division and as executive assistant to Romo.

The Home Mission Board's Mosaic Missions Award was presented to Morton Rose, who recently retired as vice president for church programs and services at the Sunday School Board. The award is presented annually to an individual who made significant contributions to language missions but is not employed by the Atlanta-based mission agency.

Rose was honored for establishing a language unit at the publishing house in Nashville and for producing materials in numerous languages for ethnic congregations, Romo said.

The Missions Heritage Award was presented to Webster C. Brown of Jefferson City, Mo., in recognition of his contribution to the development of language missions in Missouri. Brown, missions-evangelism division director for the Missouri Baptist Convention, has served the state convention for 21 years.

Arthur L. Walker of Columbus, Ohio, received the Missions Heritage Award in recognition of his development of language missions work in Ohio. Walker is missions director for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio.

Closing out the awards banquet, Joshua Grijalva of San Antonio, Texas, received a service pin for 45 years employment with the Home Mission Board. Grijalva, a national consultant for the language missions division, was honored for his assistance in developing ethnic leadership development centers.

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Bill Introduced To Counter
Religious Violence, Vandalism

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)—A bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives would impose federal criminal penalties for damage to religious property and injury to persons in the free exercise of religious beliefs.

A similar bill — also introduced by Rep. Dan Glickman, D-Kan., sponsor of the current bill — passed the House last year but was not acted upon by the Senate.

"The problem of violence aimed at religious property and the exercise of religious beliefs has not abated," Glickman said during a press conference. "It is still a serious problem.

"Our nation was founded on the basis of religious freedom and tolerance, yet there are those within our country who still vandalize religious property and jeopardize the freedom of others to safely practice their religious beliefs."

The bill would establish federal penalties up to life imprisonment and up to \$500,000 in fines for interstate violations of damaging religious property or obstructing persons' free exercise of religion.

At the press conference with Glickman were representatives from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the American Jewish Committee.

In an issued statement, Oliver S. Thomas, Baptist Joint Committee general counsel, said: "Because religious freedom is guaranteed by the federal Constitution, it is altogether appropriate for federal authorities to act when religious freedom is threatened. By passing this bill, Congress can ensure the highest possible protections for the free exercise of religion.

"Ideological labels and partisan politics have no place here. Protecting free exercise is an issue that unites all Americans. Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, people of all faiths and creeds, all are entitled to the fullest and freest exercise of their religious beliefs. To the extent government protects that free exercise, it preserves the highest traditions of our society."

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Glickman also introduced a bill combining his original criminal penalties bill with a hate crime statistics bill, originally co-sponsored by Rep. Barbara Kennelly, D-Conn. The hate crime statistics portion of the bill would provide for collection by the U.S. attorney general of data about crimes motivated by racial, religious or ethnic hatred. A similar combined bill is expected to be introduced in the Senate by Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio.

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High Court To Rule On Limits
To Sex Magazines' Display

By Stan Hasteley

Baptist Press
2/26/87

WASHINGTON (BP)—A Virginia law forbidding merchants from displaying sexually explicit magazines and books where juveniles may examine them will come under Supreme Court scrutiny next term, the high court announced Jan. 23.

At issue is a 1985 amendment to Virginia's anti-obscenity statute that effectively removed such publications from magazine racks in the state. The state asked the high court to review two lower federal panels' rulings striking down the amendment for violating the free speech provision of the First Amendment.

Both a U.S. district court and the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., agreed the amendment was "overly broad" and other methods of shielding the young from explicit materials could have been found by Virginia lawmakers.

But Richard B. Smith, an assistant attorney general for the state, asked the nation's high court to review the lower rulings, contending the challenged amendment was enacted, not to regulate the contents of sexually explicit materials, but to control their display "so as to avoid harming children."

Because the high court's calendar for the current term is full, the case will be held over for argument and decision in the term beginning in October.

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