



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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January 31, 1990

90-15

Groups ask court to reject
'clergy malpractice' claim

By Kathy Palen

N-BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)--A group of religious organizations has asked the Ohio Supreme Court to reject the legal theory of "clergy malpractice."

Filing a friend-of-the-court brief with that state's high court, the organizations argued such a theory is "fraught with insurmountable practical and constitutional problems."

At issue is whether clergy malpractice suits may be filed against pastoral counselors.

Last fall, the Ohio Court of Appeals reversed a trial court decision that dismissed charges of professional negligence against Richard P. Faber, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. The appeals panel held legal action may be taken against a pastoral counselor if that counselor is negligent in treating a patient.

The dispute arose when Leroy and Garnet Byrd, a Knox County, Ohio, couple, charged Faber with using information he gained during counseling sessions with them to induce Mrs. Byrd to have sex with him against her will. The Byrds also claimed the Seventh-day Adventist Church knew or should have known of Faber's inclination to commit such acts and thus was negligent in allowing him to assume the role of pastor.

In their brief, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, American Jewish Committee, Christian Legal Society, National Association of Evangelicals and National Council of Churches said applying the claim of malpractice -- which means falling below the established standards of conduct for a particular profession -- to clergy raises difficult questions.

The first question, according to the brief, centers on who is to define the duty of the clergy.

"Since pastoral counseling is a spiritual enterprise, the secular courts are particularly ill-equipped to establish standards of conduct for its governance," the group wrote. "Indeed, it is no more the business of courts to determine the standards of care for ministers, priests and rabbis than to determine whether prayer is efficacious for healing the sick."

Clergy malpractice also would force courts to determine when a person becomes a minister's counselee and, thus, entitled to additional legal protections and which church offices have counseling duties, the brief said.

In addition, mandating that clergy perform in a particular manner may violate the First Amendment's free exercise clause, according to the brief.

"The Supreme Court has clearly ruled that the validity or invalidity of religious belief, practice or speech cannot be reviewed or determined by the courts," the groups wrote. "Rather, the courts are limited to deciding whether such belief, practice or speech is sincere."

Pointing out that other existing legal theories could be applied in cases against clergy, the groups urged the Ohio Supreme Court to avoid the "creation of an unworkable" theory of clergy malpractice and "join the other courts throughout the country which have uniformly resisted the invitation to recognize this ill-founded, unnecessary and constitutionally suspect cause of action."

Call to solemn assembly
draws terminology questions

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Old Testament term "solemn assembly" used in connection with a call to prayer and repentance by Southern Baptist prayer leaders is drawing questions from people unfamiliar with the term.

"Solemn assembly is a very serious meeting with God," said Avery Willis, manager of the leadership development section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship training department. He said he has received several calls from church leaders who do not understand the term or who want to know how to conduct a solemn assembly.

"Solemn assembly is a biblical term," a call to prayer and fasting issued from God to the people through revered church leaders, and it comes out of the book of Job, said Henry Blackaby, director of prayer and spiritual awakening at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"It is a very solemn gathering of the people of God to come face to face with God and discuss what he has on his agenda," added Blackaby.

Prayer leaders from the Southern Baptist mission boards joined leaders from the Sunday School Board in teaching more than 180 church leaders how to conduct intercessory prayer ministries during the first Church Program Training Center seminar on prayer Jan. 22-25. Minette Drumwright, director of the international prayer office at the Foreign Mission Board, and T.W. Hunt, prayer consultant at the Sunday School Board, also participated in the seminar.

"Solemn assembly is a time to read God's word, understand that God is speaking to us and that we must respond to God," Blackaby said during an interview with the four prayer leaders. "It is not only a Bible study time but an encounter with God."

Solemn assembly does not have a specific agenda, but it should be a planned meeting of the church, association or state convention, the prayer leaders agreed.

"In most cases during Old Testament times, the prayer meetings lasted about a day, but we could say it should be an extended period of time when God's children meet and communicate with him," Willis said.

Drumwright said a solemn assembly might be better received and scheduled if called before an already-planned meeting, such as an evangelism conference or board meeting.

For example, John Jackson, president of the Southern Baptist General Convention of California, called a solemn assembly prior to a state evangelism conference, Jan. 16-17.

"I think it brought revival to the hearts of a number of pastors who will, in turn, go back to their church members and set them on fire," Jackson said. "Everybody said they recognized a change in our evangelism meeting. God just came down."

Jackson, pastor of Crescent Southern Baptist Church in Anaheim, and a trustee of the Foreign Mission Board, said he believes a solemn assembly should assume "a very detailed and planned agenda."

"I planned every song down to how many minutes they would be," he said. "The Lord didn't build the earth in a disorganized way."

California's solemn assembly ran from Monday afternoon to Tuesday morning and included "praise worship through singing, six 20-minute messages and prayer," Jackson said.

Drumwright noted that Foreign Mission Board trustees and staff have called a solemn assembly prior to their meeting Feb. 12. Jackson is chairman of the committee that is organizing the FMB solemn assembly.

During a called solemn assembly, Blackaby said, "the word of God is always prominent. We need to read from the word of God. We must look at his laws, hear from God and let him tell us where we need to adjust our lives."

Solemn assembly involves confession, celebration and covenant-making, Willis said.

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"There is praising, speaking, teaching, singing and reading from the word of God," he added.

While solemn assembly may have some characteristics of a revival, the two are not identical, leaders said.

"The term revival tends to get overlooked and overused," Blackaby said. "A solemn assembly is more than that."

The result of churches calling solemn assemblies, listening to God and responding to him, Willis said, is "spiritual awakening" across the nation and the world.

"Before we see spiritual awakening in America and the world, it is going to take time for enough people to get right with the Lord," Willis said. "That is one of the purposes of a solemn assembly -- an urgent call to prayer and repentance."

The prayer leaders believe if people respond to God in solemn assemblies, he will bring about spiritual awakening, which will result in the realization of the Southern Baptist Bold Mission Thrust campaign goal of sharing the gospel with every person in the world by the year 2000.

Hunt said the Bold Mission prayer thrust for 1990-2000 includes the goal of having a functioning intercessory prayer network in every Baptist association by 1995 and in every church by the year 2000.

"We need to move quickly," he said.

Prayer leaders have announced plans for a National Prayer Conference, June 7-9, at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary just prior to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

A text outlining a "Call for Solemn Assembly and Prayer," is available by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to National Prayer Corps, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234.

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CORRECTION: Please change the seventh paragraph of the 1/25/90 BP story titled "Missionary's mother dies after Namibia crash" to begin:

Following a memorial service for Mrs. Martz in Windhoek, John, Sarah and Mary Beth Martz and Turner left Namibia Jan. 24 and ...

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Missionary tells students,
'count trials a joy'

By Scott Collins

N-CO
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
1/30/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Christians called by God should consider their trials a joy and persevere to the completion of faith, a missionary surgeon told students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Rebekah Naylor, Southern Baptist missionary to Bangalore, India, told the students in chapel that "counting it all joy became not only a command, but a privilege" in the face of continuing threats to her and the Baptist hospital in Bangalore as a result of a labor dispute in 1987.

"We faced months of loneliness, violence, heavy responsibility and threats that came," Naylor said.

Still, Naylor said, she has maintained joy in her work even though she is faced with "the overwhelming population ... much poverty and illiteracy ... and much lostness."

"But there is great joy in serving in a country like that," she added. "There is great joy in introducing people to Jesus Christ."

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Naylor listed for students the joys she said she receives serving as a Southern Baptist missionary, including professional joy as a surgeon.

In the past 16 years, Naylor said the hospital has gone from 35 beds with 12 patients to 100 beds and an average occupancy of 88. In addition, the hospital serves between 300 and 350 outpatients each day.

She also receives professional joy from treating patients who are grateful. Many mothers have named their children after her, she added.

Along with her professional joy, Naylor told the students, she also receives "great personal joy" from other missionaries, volunteers and Indian people. Those people are "committed to share Christ with people in their own country," she said.

She receives spiritual joy in her work in the hospital through opportunities to share Christ with patients and families, she added, noting: "The primary reason that Southern Baptists are in India and in any country in the world is to tell people about Jesus. This is why we have a hospital."

Every year, between 150 and 200 people make professions of faith in Jesus through the ministry of the hospital, Naylor said. Nine hospital chaplains visit patients, distributing gospel tracts in seven languages and witnessing.

More than 75 patients attend the hospital's Sunday chapel service each week, she reported. Ninety percent of those are non-Christians, and Naylor said she presents the plan of salvation to the patients, asking those interested to stay afterward for more information.

"There has not been a single Sunday when people did not stay," she said. "They are seeking to know the Savior."

Today, the presence of the Bangalore Baptist Hospital is a witness to the community, she noted. In the 20 years since Southern Baptists began medical missions in southern India, she said, more than 400 churches have been started.

Those churches are "multiplying very rapidly," she said. "We have a goal of 500 churches in our state by the end of this year."

She has received joy from "the affirmation of answered prayers" of Southern Baptists for the work in India, she said, adding, "I assure you that God answers prayer."

But the greatest joy Naylor has is "doing God's will, being where he wants me to be," she said. "If you are seeking real joy, this is what will bring real joy to your life. Joy will come only when you are where God wants you to be."

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Though deaf, Aarons hears
call to foreign missions

By Ken Camp

F - Texas

Baptist Press
1/30/90

DALLAS (BP)--Although deaf from birth, Yvette Aarons never doubted hearing God's call to foreign missions.

When she arrives in Trinidad in early March, Aarons will become the first deaf person assigned by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to work in a deaf ministry.

"Receiving the assignment, I knew it was God's confirmation of his plan for my life," she said. "It is an exciting -- yet humbling -- feeling."

Aarons, a native of Jamaica and a naturalized U.S. citizen, was commissioned for her two-year special assignment in deaf ministry by Woodhaven Deaf Baptist Church in Houston, where she had been a Mission Service Corps volunteer youth minister.

She worked on the church staff for two years after completing Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Aarons first applied to the Foreign Mission Board as a candidate for missions service in 1985, but her request for consideration was denied because she was handicapped. However, in 1987, the board voted to eliminate deafness as a handicap precluding people for foreign missions service.

Last October, Aarons was notified that she had been approved as a "special assignment" worker to Trinidad, where she will teach sign language, provide religious instruction to the deaf and develop outreach ministries and other programs for deaf people.

She is scheduled to attend orientation from Jan. 31 to Feb. 14 at the Missionary Learning Center in Rockville, Va., and to arrive in Trinidad in March.

"Often I ask God: 'What is so special about me? Why me?' I am simply delighted to be able to reach other people of like language and experiences. The deaf world is a smaller world, so I already feel a bond with the deaf people of Trinidad," she said.

Although American Sign Language generally is used by most deaf people in Trinidad, Aarons said signing is culturally based and she will face minor language differences.

"But any culture shock will be a mild one. I believe it would be related more to customs and things like that than to sign language," she said.

Noting that she has lived in Jamaica, New York, Maryland and Texas and has traveled to Los Angeles and New Zealand with missions teams to the Deaf Olympics, Aarons added, "I am adjusted to the need to be flexible."

Although the road to her missions assignment was rocky, Aarons said, she encountered "no major obstacles, just challenges," and she is anticipating service in Trinidad.

"Being deaf is a great asset. The bridge is already built because of my deafness. I will just need to cross it and reach the deaf people of Trinidad for Jesus," she said.

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Former ACTS show wins
outdoor-travel award

N- C O

Baptist Press
1/30/90

DEARBORN, Mich. (BP)--"Outdoor Magazine," a television series that appeared on the Southern Baptist ACTS network for four years, has won an award from the National Outdoor-Travel Film Festival.

The series, produced by and featuring Southern Baptist layman Dick Davis, received the festival's Theodore Roosevelt Award for continuing contributions to the enjoyment of American sportsmen.

Davis is a member of Pineville Park Baptist Church in Pineville, La., and formerly was public relations director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention. He now is president of Sportsman Productions, which produces outdoor recreation and tourism videotapes, as well as the series and television specials.

"Outdoor Magazine" won first place in the festival's "best hunting film" category and received citations of merit in four other categories. Four divisions of the ABC television network won other categories, as did Cable News Network and the Korea National Tourism Corp.

Davis' series appeared on the ACTS network until ACTS started charging individual programs for airtime. Davis hopes to return the program to ACTS soon, he said. "Outdoor Magazine" now appears on Prime Network, comprised of several regional sports networks.

The series also has been named the best television presentation by the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

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