



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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90-85

Shackelford, Martin
told to resign at BP

N-CC

NASHVILLE (BP)--Al Shackelford and Dan Martin have been told to resign as director and news editor of Baptist Press, news service of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The six officers of the SBC Executive Committee instructed Harold C. Bennett, president of the Executive Committee, to tell Shackelford and Martin to either resign or they would be "dealt with harshly."

On June 19, Bennett conveyed the message to Shackelford and Martin. They were told if they resigned quietly, they would be continued on the payroll through the end of the fiscal year, Sept. 30, but would neither attend nor report on the Sept. 17-19 meeting of the Executive Committee.

Shackelford and Martin also were offered "up to six months" salary and benefits after September if they were unemployed, but only on the condition they kept silent and no state Baptist editor came to their defense.

By late June, neither Shackelford nor Martin had responded to the request.

The future of Baptist Press is unclear, since Shackelford and Martin are the only professional staff members producing the news service. The third member of the professional staff, Marv Knox, resigned June 1 to become editor of the Western Recorder, newsjournal of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

The six officers gave Bennett the instructions during a special called meeting at 3 p.m., Wednesday, June 13, just prior to the annual organizational meeting of the Executive Committee, at 4 p.m. in the Hyatt Regency Hotel in New Orleans, site of the 1990 annual meeting of the SBC.

During the organizational meeting, three of the officers were re-elected to second terms. They are Chairman Sam Pace, director of associational missions in Lawton, Okla.; Vice Chairman Paul Pressler, a state appeals court judge from Houston; and Secretary Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala.

The other three officers are appointed to chair the three subcommittees of the Executive Committee by the elected officers. They are Charles Sullivan, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lenoir City, Tenn., administrative and convention arrangements subcommittee; David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Lake Charles, La., business and finance subcommittee; and William F. Harrell, pastor of Abilene Baptist Church, Martinez, Ga., program and budget subcommittee.

Under Executive Committee bylaws, the officers as a body have no stated authority to elect or dismiss staff members of the Executive Committee.

Baptist Press, which has received high marks from secular and denominational journalists for its objectivity, balance and fairness in the midst of the theological/political turmoil of the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination, has been under increasing fire from the new Conservative majority.

The officers' instructions to Bennett came one day after Conservatives won their 12th victory by electing Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, as president. Chapman decisively defeated Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, the Moderate standard bearer.

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Baptist Press, which was founded in 1947 at the request of the editors of the state Baptist newspapers, has been housed at the Executive Committee since its inception in an effort to protect it from efforts to muzzle, silence or control the news.

Currently, it carries more than 1,200 news and feature stories about the events, personalities, agencies and work of the SBC. It circulates daily to more than 400 outlets, including 38 state Baptist newspapers with a combined circulation of 1.8-million, as well as to all members of the Religion Newswriters Association, composed of religion specialists on newspapers, magazines and broadcast media.

Shackleford and Martin each has more than 30 years of journalism experience.

Shackleford, 58, was elected vice president of public relations and director of Baptist Press in February 1987 on a 32-26 vote.

Previously, he was editor of the Baptist and Reflector, newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention; the Indiana Baptist, newsjournal of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana; and on the staffs of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

He is a native of Carrollton, Ga., and a graduate of Mercer University, Macon, Ga.; the University of Georgia in Athens; and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Martin, 51, came to Baptist Press as news editor Aug. 1, 1980. Previously, he was on the staff of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Texas convention.

He is a native of Wichita Falls, Texas, and a graduate of Midwestern University in Wichita Falls, Texas. He also attended Southwestern seminary.

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(This Baptist Press story was written by Dan Martin and Al Shackleford.

SBC president makes first
agency visit to SSB

Baptist Press
6/26/90

N-00 BSSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman predicted times of disagreement in the denomination are coming to an end and called for increased commitment to cooperative missions and reaching the world for Christ during participation in new trustee orientation at the Sunday School Board June 21-22.

The visit was Chapman's first to an SBC agency since his June 12 election as president of the 14.9-million-member denomination. As president, Chapman is an ex-officio member of the board of trustees of each SBC agency.

"I come to you today to say I affirm you as one person and on behalf of Southern Baptists," Chapman, whose wife, Jodi, just completed eight years' service as a trustee, told employees during a chapel service.

"As we stand on the Word of God, I pray we are in a position to move on with the things that are our priorities -- reaching people for Christ and Bold Mission Thrust," the SBC goal of sharing Christ with every person in the world by the year 2000.

"I pray God will bring revival to Southern Baptists and through us to the world," said Chapman.

Board President Lloyd Elder expressed appreciation to Chapman for making time to visit the board so soon after his election.

"I deeply appreciate his presence and his expression of commitment to this board and its ministry," said Elder.

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

Court rejects
'right to die'

By Kathy Palen

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court has ruled the U.S. Constitution contains no absolute "right to die."

In a 5-4 decision, the high court held a state may require "clear and convincing evidence" of an incompetent person's wishes in deciding whether to discontinue nutrition and hydration of that person.

The court also held the Constitution's due process clause does not require a state to accept the "substituted judgment" of close family members in such decisions.

The decision blocked a request by the parents of Nancy Cruzan, a 32-year-old Missouri woman who has been in a "persistent vegetative state" since a 1983 automobile accident, that their daughter no longer be administered food and water artificially.

Writing for the court in *Cruzan v. Director, Missouri Department of Health*, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist said the question before the court was whether Cruzan has a constitutional right that would require a hospital to withdraw life-sustaining treatment from her.

Although the court assumes the Constitution would grant a competent person the right to refuse lifesaving hydration and nutrition, Rehnquist wrote, an incompetent person is unable to make an informed and voluntary choice about such treatment. That right of choice, he added, must be exercised by some sort of surrogate.

"Here, Missouri has in effect recognized that under certain circumstances a surrogate may act for the patient in electing to have hydration and nutrition withdrawn in such a way as to cause death," Rehnquist said, "but it has established a procedural safeguard to assure that the action of the surrogate conforms as best it may to the wishes expressed by the patient while competent. Missouri requires that evidence of the incompetent's wishes as to the withdrawal of treatment be proved by clear and convincing evidence.

"The question, then, is whether the United States Constitution forbids the establishment of this procedural requirement by the state. ... We believe Missouri may legitimately seek to safeguard the personal element of this choice through the imposition of heightened evidentiary requirements."

The court held a state is entitled to guard against potential abuses in such situations, as well as to assert an unqualified interest in the "preservation of human life to be weighed against the constitutionally protected interests of the individual."

A state also may place an increased risk of an erroneous decision on those seeking to terminate an incompetent person's life-sustaining treatment, Rehnquist said.

"An erroneous decision not to terminate results in a maintenance of the status quo," he wrote, adding, "An erroneous decision to withdraw life-sustaining treatment, however, is not susceptible of correction."

Although the high court previously has upheld the constitutionality of states' favoring traditional family relationships and relying on family decision making, Rehnquist said, those holdings may not be turned into constitutional requirements that states must follow such practices.

Rehnquist was joined in his opinion by Justices Byron R. White, Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia and Anthony M. Kennedy.

In a concurring opinion, O'Connor added her view that the court's decision in *Cruzan* does not preclude a future determination that the Constitution requires states to implement the decisions of a patient's duly appointed surrogate. Nor, she wrote, does the decision prevent states from developing other approaches for protecting an incompetent person's right to refuse medical treatment.

"No national consensus has yet emerged on the best solution for this difficult and sensitive problem," O'Connor said. "Today we decide only that one state's practice does not violate the Constitution; the more challenging task of crafting appropriate procedures for safeguarding incompetents' liberty interests is entrusted to the 'laboratory' of the states."

But in his concurring opinion, Scalia said he would have preferred that the court "announce, clearly and promptly, that the federal courts have no business in this field." Decisions such as at what point life becomes worthless, he argued, should be left to the states and their citizens.

"Our salvation is the equal protection clause, which requires the democratic majority to accept for themselves and their loved ones what they impose on you and me," Scalia wrote. "This court need not, and has no authority to, inject itself into every field of human activity where irrationality and oppression may theoretically occur, and if it tries to do so it will destroy itself."

In one of two dissenting opinions, Justice William J. Brennan Jr. -- joined by Justices Thurgood Marshall and Harry A. Blackmun -- wrote, "Nancy Cruzan is entitled to choose to die with dignity."

No state interest could outweigh the rights of an individual in Cruzan's position, Brennan said.

"Whatever a state's possible interests in mandating life-support treatment under other circumstances, there is no good to be obtained here by Missouri's insistence that Nancy Cruzan remain on life-support systems if it is indeed her wish not to do so," he wrote. "Missouri does not claim, nor could it, that society as a whole will be benefited by Nancy's receiving medical treatment."

Until an incompetent person's wishes have been determined, Brennan said, the state's only interest is in safeguarding the accuracy of that determination.

"A state may ensure that the person who makes the decision on the patient's behalf is the one whom the patient himself would have selected to make that choice for him," he wrote. "And a state may exclude from consideration anyone having improper motives. But a state generally must either repose the choice with the person whom the patient himself would most likely have chosen as proxy or leave the decision to the patient's family."

In a separate dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens said the court's decision in Cruzan means "an innocent person's constitutional right to be free from unwanted medical treatment is thereby categorically limited to those patients who had the foresight to make an unambiguous statement of their wishes while competent."

At the heart of Missouri's policy, Stevens said, is an effort to define life, rather than to protect it.

"The failure of Missouri's policy to heed the interests of a dying individual with respect to matters so private is ample evidence of the policy's illegitimacy," he wrote.

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Witnessing effort results in
575 professions of faith

Baptist Press
6/26/90

ATLANTA (BP)--The total number of professions of faith in Christ recorded in Southern Baptists' door-to-door witnessing effort in New Orleans increased by 54 when all associations reported.

During the convention, 521 professions of faith were reported, but three associations had not turned in their results. The total reached 575 when all reports were made.

Volunteers recruited by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board worked with 113 Louisiana and Mississippi churches to canvas neighborhoods and share the gospel on Saturday prior to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

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The total compares with 471 decisions for salvation made during the one-day evangelism emphasis before the SBC annual meeting in Las Vegas last year. However, last year 9.9 percent of the 20,423 messengers participated in the door-to-door visitation, compared with 3.54 percent of the 38,416 messengers this year.

Similar witnessing efforts are being planned by the Home Mission Board prior to the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta next year and in Indianapolis in 1992.

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CORRECTION: In BP story "BSSB trustees approve termination of BTN," mailed 6/22/90, please make the following correction in the 14th paragraph:

Elder said all BTN subscribers are being notified by immediate correspondence of the termination of the seven-year-old network.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
