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90-143

Mission board to appeal ruling
to Virginia Supreme Court

By Art Toalston

NFB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board will appeal a \$1.56 million legal judgment against it to the Virginia Supreme Court.

Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks said the board would move to the next step in the appeals process after a Richmond Circuit Court judge upheld a seven-member jury's verdict in a suit waged by a former missionary to Africa on behalf of her four children.

The board has three months to file formal petitions of appeal with the Virginia Supreme Court after an October ruling by Judge T.J. Markow upheld the verdict by the jury in July. Markow presided at the five-day trial.

Parks said the verdict threatens "the financial viability of religious agencies anywhere" by making them legally liable for the personal behavior of their employees -- in this case a father's sexual abuse of his daughters.

"We do as careful screening as anyone," Parks said. "There's no way we can guarantee good behavior as much as we try."

Foreign Mission Board attorney Lewis T. Booker of Richmond said the case also could be precedent-setting. "There's never been a case that I'm aware of where an employer has been held responsible to the children of an employee for an employee's misdeeds," he said.

Under Virginia law, the state's Supreme Court is not obliged to hear every appeal. If it refuses to hear the case, the verdict will stand.

During the trial, former missionary Diana Sue Wade contended her children suffered trauma because board officials learned that her husband, G. Thomas Wade Jr., was sexually abusing their oldest daughter but did not disclose it to Mrs. Wade so she could halt the molestation. Mrs. Wade contended her husband continued to abuse the daughter as well as a second daughter, who was adopted, and also began abusing a third daughter.

Booker argued during the trial that board officials who handled the family's case acted reasonably under the circumstances. The board administrator who first learned of the abuse testified that he sought the advice of a psychiatrist and a pastoral counseling expert on how to deal with the family, told Wade to see a counselor in Africa, and when the missionary failed to do so, ordered him to return to the United States with his family for counseling.

In an August hearing on legal issues in the case, Booker asked Markow to set aside the jury's verdict. He disputed Mrs. Wade's claim that she and her husband had a binding contract with the board requiring its officials to do their best to protect the family's health, welfare and safety.

Booker argued that Virginia law requires any contract covering more than a one-year period to be in writing to be legally enforceable. The board enters into no such written contracts with its missionaries, he noted.

Judge Markow, however, ruled that the board and the Wades had an "at will" contract that both parties entered willingly. It is a type of contract that does not need to be in writing or cover a specified time span to be enforceable, Markow ruled.

Mrs. Wade, 41, of Anchorage, Alaska, had sought \$141 million in damages when she filed suit in April 1988 in Virginia, where the board is located.

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She and her husband, an agriculturist, were appointed as missionaries in 1976 and worked in Kenya and then Botswana. They returned to the United States in April 1984 on a furlough and then went on leave of absence. Wade, now 49, was arrested for sexual abuse of his daughters in June 1985 and is serving a 12-year sentence in an Alaskan correctional center. Mrs. Wade divorced him after the arrest.

In its verdict, the jury awarded \$850,000 to the adopted daughter, now age 17; \$350,000 to each of the other two daughters, now ages 22 and 17; and \$10,000 to the couple's 20-year-old son, for a total of \$1.56 million.

Virginia law permits Mrs. Wade to file another suit on her own behalf within six months of the start of the children's trial, not one year as previously reported.

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75 percent claim Christ commitment
but less than half attend church By Mark Wingfield

N-NMB

Baptist Press
10/18/90

ATLANTA (BP)--Three of every four American adults claim to have made a commitment to Jesus Christ, but only four in 10 attend church in a typical week, The Gallup Poll reports.

However, nearly two adults in three (63 percent) believe religion still has answers to today's problems, the survey found.

There is a significant difference between the number of people who claim to be committed to Jesus Christ and the number of people estimated by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to be Christians. While the Gallup Poll found 74 percent of Americans saying they had "made a commitment to Jesus Christ," research by the HMB estimates only 32 percent of the U.S. population to be Christians -- as Southern Baptists define the term.

The single question in the Gallup Poll takes into account only what people say about themselves and provides no definition of the commitment made. Southern Baptists traditionally assign a stricter definition to Christianity that includes forsaking "sinful" ways and making a personal commitment of one's life to the cause of Christ.

Disparity in the number of people who claim to have made a commitment and the number identified as Christians shows Americans don't understand the concepts of sin and salvation, said Darrell Robinson, HMB vice president for evangelism. The survey results also show poor understanding of the relationship between commitment, morality and ethics, he suggested.

Robinson said Southern Baptists should be spurred to action by the Gallup Poll findings, because they indicate Americans are open to spiritual things. "This reflects a harvest that is ready to be reaped through personal and mass evangelism," he said.

According to the Gallup survey, the 74 percent of Americans claiming a commitment to Jesus Christ is a record high. A 1988 Gallup study found 66 percent of the population making such a claim, while a 1978 study registered only 60 percent.

The 1990 Gallup survey found women (79 percent) are more likely than men (67 percent) to say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ. Also, whites (74 percent) are more likely than blacks (58 percent) to make that claim.

Other statistical breakdowns show people age 50 and above (78 percent) are more likely than 30-49 year olds (74 percent) or 18-29 year olds (67 percent) to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Also, college graduates (66 percent) are less likely than those who did not graduate from college or only attended high school (75 percent) to make this claim.

The likelihood of a person claiming a commitment to Jesus Christ also decreased in direct proportion to income, ranging from 76 percent of those making less than \$20,000 annually to 68 percent of those making more than \$50,000.

When asked whether they had attended church or synagogue in the last seven days, only 40 percent of respondents said yes. This is about the same attendance rate found in Gallup surveys in the 1970s and 1980s. The high attendance found by Gallup was in the 1950s, when 46 percent of adults said they attended church the previous week.

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Females (44 percent) are more likely than males (34 percent) to have attended church, the survey found. Also, 49 percent of black respondents said they had attended church, compared to 39 percent of whites.

People who reside in the Western United States are the least likely to have attended church. Only 28 percent of Westerners said they had attended church in the past week, compared to 40 percent of Easterners, 43 percent of Southerners and 46 percent of Midwesterners.

Another question in the Gallup survey asked, "Do you believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems, or that religion is largely old-fashioned and out of date?"

The majority of respondents (63 percent) said religion can answer modern problems. Another 19 percent said they weren't certain, while 18 percent said religion is old-fashioned and out of date.

Protestants have more faith in religion than Catholics, by a margin of 71 percent to 59 percent. Also, 71 percent of females expressed confidence in religion compared to 55 percent of males.

The older a person is, the more likely he is to have confidence in religion, the survey found. Among adults age 50 and above, 68 percent said religion can answer today's problems, while 63 percent of adults age 30-49 and 58 percent of adults age 18-29 agreed.

Southerners expressed the most confidence in religion, with 74 percent affirming religion as relevant to modern life. That compares to 64 percent of Midwesterners, 57 percent of Easterners and 55 percent of Westerners.

Blacks were more likely than whites to express confidence in religion, by a margin of 79 percent to 62 percent.

The three questions were asked by The Gallup Poll in telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,236 adults age 18 and older. Results were published in *Emerging Trends*, a publication of the Princeton Religion Research Center.

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CLC ponders
NEA abolishment

By Louis Moore

N-CC (CLC)

Baptist Press
10/18/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has expressed strong concern that U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher's amendment to the National Endowment for the Arts reauthorization bill was defeated in the U.S. House Oct. 11 by a vote of 175-249.

The Rohrabacher amendment required the NEA to exercise oversight over the disbursement of federal tax dollars to the arts community. This oversight would have included restrictions on the type of art which the endowment can and cannot fund.

Instead, the House adopted by a vote of 382-42 an amendment to the NEA reauthorization bill that the commission says will allow the NEA to continue funding art projects many Christians consider "obscene, highly offensive, morally repugnant and sacrilegious." That amendment was proposed by U.S. Reps. Pat Williams, D-Mont., and E. Thomas Coleman, R-Mo.

Williams called approval of his amendment "a bigger victory in favor of tolerance and freedom of expression than I frankly expected."

The Williams/Coleman amendment does not adequately address the problem of funding for objectionable works of art.

In his letter to Rohrabacher signaling endorsement of the amendment, Land said, "The arts community has been crying 'censorship,' while ignoring the point that public funds are involved. Their right to do their 'art' is not the question before Congress, only their claim to a right to tax support for their offensive works.

"There is no right to public funds without accountability to standards of public interest and decency," Land said. "Such accountability is meaningful only if it comes before the money is spent."

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Land said the Williams/Coleman substitute inadequately addresses the concerns of many Southern Baptists. "Williams/Coleman does not attempt to solve the problem with works which are not legally obscene, but which are sacrilegious or morally repugnant nonetheless," he said.

Land said Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ" (a crucifix which was placed in a jar of urine) still will be eligible for funding under the Williams/Coleman language.

The Williams/Coleman amendment will "pass the buck to the courts to determine, after the money has already been spent," whether the Supreme Court's obscenity test has been violated, he said. The Court has said material is not obscene if it contains any "serious artistic merit."

Land said he fears that NEA funding will be construed as giving questionable materials validation as having "serious artistic merit." He cited the Mapplethorpe retrospective, which has drawn the most criticism and includes photographs of partially or fully nude children, men engaging in homosexual relations, and other sexually explicit poses.

"If a jury in Cincinnati, Ohio, was not able to find obscenity in Robert Mapplethorpe's photos, then the NEA will be able to continue to fund so-called 'homoerotic art,' child pornography and other sexually explicit works without any fear of reprisal," said James A. Smith, the commission's director of government relations.

The Rohrabacher amendment was "the best opportunity" the House was given to address these concerns, Land said.

In his letter to Rohrabacher, Land repeated an earlier warning that "unless Congress implements meaningful standards which will prohibit the funding of obscene, highly offensive, morally repugnant and sacrilegious art" the commission will urge the nation's 14.9 million Southern Baptists to support abolition of the NEA."

"In light of the rejection by the House of Representatives of a very reasonable alternative which would have addressed many of our concerns, Southern Baptists should now seriously consider whether the National Endowment for the Arts should be abolished," Land said.

He said the commission will begin to assess its future stand on the NEA.

The commission is the moral concerns and public policy agency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Overseas human needs spending
could reach former high level

By Marty Croll

N-FMB

Baptist Press
10/18/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptists this year could appropriate one of the highest amounts ever to help people overseas meet bodily needs even while the Foreign Mission Board increases its focus on evangelism and starting churches.

Last year overseas human needs appropriations sank to \$5.2 million, the lowest total since 1981. The number of FMB human needs projects slipped to 191, from 245 in 1988.

But through September of this year the mission board had already released \$5.4 million, and planners project a total as high as \$10.2 million by year's end. Southern Baptists' largest expenditure for overseas human needs in one year was \$10.9 million in 1988.

"Contrary to the perception some people might have, the board is not cutting back on its human needs efforts, but is making a more effective use than ever of its funds," said John Cheyne, associate director of FMB research and planning. Cheyne has guided Southern Baptists' overseas human needs efforts for 13 years.

On several occasions Cheyne has presented detailed plans to board strategists on how missionaries can involve themselves in holistic ministry -- helping people grow not only spiritually but also in their physical, social, emotional and economic well-being.

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Late last year board President R. Keith Parks, as a result of a boardwide study for streamlining staff, dissolved the human needs department and moved the administration of world hunger and general relief programs into the portfolio of strategy research and planning.

But Cheyne believes the move confused some people, including missionaries. During the first part of this year requests from missionaries for human needs money only trickled in. In May Cheyne asked Parks to reiterate to field administrators the importance of designing human needs programs. After that, funding requests picked up markedly.

"The board is considering strategic use of these funds as never before," said Cheyne. "We're combining concern for the human condition with strategic objectives in church planting and evangelism. We're going to areas where the very act of meeting needs opens doors for personnel to go in and minister holistically," such as in Romania, where Baptists have gained new acceptance.

In comparison to funds spent for one-time disaster relief efforts, money sent overseas for projects that enable people to raise their overall standard of living shows a marked increase this year over years past, he said.

Some recent appropriations include:

-- In the Philippines, \$123,502 to help teach families effective home farming, nutrition and simple health techniques;

-- In Brazil, \$4,610 to teach backyard gardening, small animal production and trades such as sewing;

-- In Ecuador, \$24,252 to help people break out of the poverty cycle by teaching them how to farm fish in ponds;

-- In Senegal, \$45,000 to dig 10 wells to provide clean drinking water.

In Romania, Southern Baptists' readiness to help people get their farms producing again after a drought has raised the credibility of local Baptists in their communities, reported Cheyne. Last March, after Romania opened to the West, the Foreign Mission Board sent \$1 million in seeds, herbicides and insecticides. Government officials there estimated it would have cost them \$7.6 million to purchase the same supplies for themselves, Cheyne said.

With the help of field administrator Paul Thibodeaux, who worked with European Baptists to support the effort, Southern Baptists sent help to Romania within three weeks of an initial needs survey there.

"Government officials said they were incredulous that the total response came within the time they had designated to be able to plant crops in mid-April," Cheyne said. "Romanian Baptists have now received a new level of credibility with national officials and local people for an ongoing witness."

Cheyne visited Romania again in September. "Every door was open to us," he said. "Now we're getting invitations for personnel -- people in marketing and management, technicians, all kinds of people. This extends the scope of our potential witness to contacts in every sphere of life."

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EDITORS NOTE: In the (BP) release dated 10/17/90, kill the story "Care urged in use of aid to Russian Baptists." This story was replaced by "Dollars can be mixed blessing to Eastern European churches" appearing in the same issue.

Thank you,
Baptist Press

No execution ordered for
China pastor; church reopens

By Michael Chute

N-FMB

GUANGZHOU, China (BP)--Past a sign on the door outlawing his church, and up a long, narrow flight of stairs, Chinese pastor Lin Xiangao welcomes visitors to the Damazhan house church in Guangzhou, China.

Known in the West as Samuel Lamb, the son of a Baptist pastor leads a 500-member outlawed congregation that meets just off busy Beijing Road in the heart of Guangzhou (Canton). In fact, this morning he has just finished one of five worship services he conducts in his home every week.

"I'm still here now," Lin said, referring to a widely reported rumor that China's communist government had marked him for execution. "If it were true, I wouldn't be here. I'd be in prison."

Last February 60 Public Security Bureau agents armed with a search warrant raided Lin's modest house church. They ransacked both floors of the building and confiscated nearly everything. That included thousands of Bibles, hymnals and other Christian books, as well as audio tapes and tape recorders, loudspeakers and amplifiers, money and the church organ.

Officials took down the closed-circuit TV system Lin used to communicate with church members meeting upstairs while he preached to overflow crowds in worship services downstairs.

Lin was arrested and subjected to 21 hours of interrogation before being released. In the last six months he has been hauled in for questioning eight more times, most recently by the government Religious Affairs Bureau Aug. 15. He is not allowed to leave Guangzhou because officials say "they might call me at any moment," Lin explained. "It's like house arrest."

"They took away my address book and contacted all the people and told them not to come" to the church. "They said I had been arrested and sentenced to over 10 years in prison. Ten years, sentenced to death -- it's very close," he added, explaining how the execution rumor may have started.

The incidents are the latest in a lifetime of trials for the minister who spent more than 20 years in prison for his Christian beliefs during Mao Zedong's reign. Lin started the Damazhan church in 1950 and has baptized more than 1,700 people through the church's work.

Authorities haven't asked Lin to make self-criticisms, a traditional form of punishment in communist Chinese society. But they have asked him about his numerous foreign contacts. He apparently is safeguarded by a large group of influential supporters overseas, including U.S. senators and congressmen.

Two years ago a visiting group of Americans presented Lin with a letter and Bible from then-President Ronald Reagan. Evangelist Billy Graham has preached in his church; so has former astronaut James Irwin.

A book of calling cards he displays shows Lin is well-connected. They include the likes of David Keegan, U.S. consul in Guangzhou. He shows visitors a piece of the Berlin Wall that a friend gave him.

Lin likes to say he's "66 years old, born in the same year as George Bush." A Bush associate recently gave Lin a pen. Public Security Bureau agents seized the pen and other memorabilia from overseas friends.

In defiance of the government's order, Lin reopened the house church in mid-April. About half of the church's original 1,000 members have returned.

"I now sit down to preach," Lin stated. "If I stand up they say it's preaching, but if I sit down it's a fellowship."

At issue is Lin's refusal to register his house church with the government. He also refuses to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the officially recognized body that represents Chinese Protestants in dealings with the government. Other charges against Lin include violating government policy on religion by holding illegal meetings, receiving foreign funding and allowing foreigners to preach in his church.

Lin counters government arguments on each issue. He says the constitution of China guarantees freedom of religion and does not prohibit home meetings. Several articles in recent years in the Communist Party's main newspaper, The People's Daily, have stressed China's religious freedom under communism.

Bishop Ding Guangxun (K.H. Ting), Three-Self leader and president of the China Christian Council, said last year that "meeting points," or home worship gatherings, should be allowed to meet without restriction. He cited Lin's Damazhan meeting point as an example, according to a Hong Kong magazine.

Provincial governments in China vary in local rules on registering churches. Guangdong province, along with its capital city of Guangzhou, issued a particularly restrictive document in 1988 forbidding unregistered house churches to meet. The Hong Kong magazine reported that Bishop Ding opposed the Guangdong restrictions.

"Registration in China is not the same as the outside world," Lin said. "Three-Self is the 'official' church and it's controlled by the government. 'By Three-Self' means 'by the government.' It's the same. And that's against God's will," he added, maintaining that Christ is head of the church.

Three-Self leaders like Bishop Ding have long denied such charges. They insist their government contacts have gained churches more freedom, not less. "Three-Self" refers to the principles that govern China's churches -- self-government, self-support and self-propagation.

"Self-control means not controlled by the foreign church but controlled by the government," Lin charged. "The law of China says we have freedom of religion but there's no freedom. They say we have the freedom to believe or not. But they stop our church; they give no freedom to us. Freedom comes from God, not from man."

Lin said he instructs his church members to obey the government. For instance, he told his congregation not to march in the spring 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations.

"But if something contrasts with our faith, we obey the law of God," he stated. "If there's no contrast, then we obey the government. We must obey the present government. That's what the Bible teaches."

How long Guangzhou authorities will try to persuade Lin to register his church and join Three-Self remains to be seen. For now, he is unrepentant.

"Why should my house church be closed when I haven't done anything to violate the law?" he asked.

"Tell (Christians) to pray for revival (in China). Tell them to pray for us to stand firm."