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91-90

Court hears Foreign Board appeal
of \$1.56 million Wade verdict

By Robert O'Brien

N.F.M.B.

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Virginia Supreme Court will rule sometime in September whether a \$1.56 million legal judgment against the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board will stand. Then the board will prepare to face another lawsuit next January growing out of the same case.

The \$1.56 million judgment against the board was awarded by a Richmond Circuit Court jury on July 13, 1990, to children of a former missionary couple who suffered sexual abuse from their father, G. Thomas (Tom) Wade Jr.

The circuit court judge later refused to set aside the verdict, and the Foreign Mission Board appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court, which heard arguments June 7 and is expected to hand down a decision in September.

The children's mother, Diana Sue Wade, filed a second suit last November, alleging damages to herself. It was set for trial Aug. 12, 1991, in Richmond Circuit Court but was continued until Jan. 13, 1992, to allow the Virginia Supreme Court time to rule on the appeal in the children's case.

The original lawsuit, filed on the children's behalf by Diana Wade, contended board officials learned Tom Wade was sexually abusing the couple's oldest daughter but did not disclose it to Mrs. Wade so she could halt it.

The children's lawsuit contended Wade continued to abuse the daughter as well as a second daughter and he began molesting a third daughter. The couple also has a son. The abuse began in 1979 in Botswana, Africa, when the oldest daughter was about 10 years old.

Board attorneys argued board officials who handled the family's case acted reasonably under the circumstances by telling Wade to inform his wife of the abuse and by arranging for professional counseling. The official who first learned of the case said he acted on the advice of a psychiatrist and a pastoral counseling expert in dealing with the family. He said he did not know the extent of the abuse and was assured it had stopped two years before.

Wade refused to tell his wife or to accept the counseling. Board officials directed him to return to the United States with his family for counseling. He later was arrested and imprisoned for child abuse. The Wades are now divorced.

In arguments before the Virginia Supreme Court, attorneys for both sides said Wade's actions were tragic, unconscionable and unanticipated.

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The crux of the argument centered around interpretation under Virginia law about what contractual relationship, if any, existed between the Wades and the Foreign Mission Board that would call for the board to protect the children from abuse by their father.

The Richmond Circuit Court had ruled an enforceable oral contract existed. The board contended again in the appeal to the Virginia Supreme Court no such oral contract existed, such a contract would have to be in writing to be enforceable, and no one could have anticipated any such conduct on the part of Wade.

Attorneys for the Wades disagreed, saying an oral contract existed which did not have to be in writing. They said the jury had the right to decide a contract existed and to require the board to pay for the consequences of Wade's molestation.

Foreign Mission Board attorneys asked the Virginia Supreme Court to reverse the lower court and rule in favor of the board, but, if that was not possible, to remand the case for a new trial with proper instructions for the jury. Board attorneys contended jury members had not been instructed properly for their deliberations, while the Wades' attorneys disagreed.

The Wades' attorneys urged the lower court's decision be affirmed but, if a new trial is granted, a charge of negligence against the board be reinstated. The lower court had dismissed the charge of negligence, allowing the case to be tried only on the grounds of breach of contract.

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Volcano delays missionaries
returning to assignments

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N-FMB

MANILA, Philippines (BP)--A thundering volcano that has forced thousands of refugees on a trek along roads coated in soggy foot-deep ash also has delayed the return of Southern Baptist missionaries from their annual meeting in Baguio City.

Missionaries who must return by air to their assignments were stranded June 17 in Manila, where officials announced the airport would be closed at least until June 19 because of volcanic ash from Mount Pinatubo to the north.

Some missionaries driving home near the volcano saw bridges washed out by mud slides and damage to sugar cane fields. They also saw power lines and rooftops that had collapsed under ash transformed into a sticky goo by heavy rains.

Mount Pinatubo began erupting June 9 for the first time in 600 years. At first scientists feared the mountain might blow apart. But now they say periodic smaller eruptions likely will continue for years, according to news reports.

The third floor of the educational building of Clark Field Baptist Church has collapsed under heavy ash, reported missionary Sam Waldron June 18. The roof of the church's sanctuary has been cleaned to prevent further damage. The church, led by missionaries and attended primarily by U.S. military families, is just outside Clark Air Base, which is buried under 10 to 12 inches of ash. The mission-owned residence in nearby Angeles City also is buckling under ash and is being cleaned to prevent collapse.

Missionaries have little information so far on how other churches have been affected by the eruption. One of many churches in the area affected by the volcano sits on the slope of Mount Pinatubo.

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Midwestern's Professor Wamble
views life as a pilgrimage

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--G. Hugh Wamble views life as a pilgrimage, a journey in which each child of God follows the ways God has made known to the individual. He describes his own experience as "walking according to the light given or yet to be given," and considers recent events in his life as presenting further opportunities for growth in his personal pilgrimage.

Since January, Wamble has been fighting the effects of a malignant brain tumor. His doctors have tried surgery, radiation and chemotherapy to fight the disease called glioblastoma.

While praying for God's guidance for the physicians who monitor his brain, Wamble relies on the grace and power of God to provide spiritual resources that go beyond medical science.

"Of this I am confident: God has not abandoned me and will not abandon me. His power, grace and mercy have been sufficient for anything I have faced in my 68 years of life. I can walk confidently with God into the future, whatever obstacle may arise -- glioblastoma, or any other problem," he noted.

Wamble, who has been professor of church history at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1959, has faced other obstacles in life with the same strength of spirit and confidence in God's leadership.

Forty-six years ago, he was a Marine sergeant serving with U.S. military forces on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II. Wamble said he is proud to relate after a lengthy and difficult battle between American and Japanese forces, he was the radio operator who sent a message off the island that Iwo Jima had been secured.

"I discovered there that there are some things for which one must be willing to give his life," Wamble said.

Before entering the Marines, he already had sensed God's call to ministry, and when he left the military service, Wamble sought the education he would need to follow God's leadership into a Christian vocation. He earned degrees at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"I entered into a covenant with God," he recalled, "that I would, to the best of my understanding, give my life to the ministry to which he had called me."

While a student, Wamble served two pastorates in Kentucky. Then, from 1955-58, he taught church history at Southern Seminary.

In 1959, he received a call from Millard Berquist, the first president of Midwestern Seminary. The fledgling institution had just opened its doors to students the previous year, and Berquist asked Wamble to consider joining the faculty as professor of church history. Wamble agreed and the seminary trustees elected him to the position. He began teaching courses during the institution's second year of operation, and has been Midwestern's only professor in the church history field.

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Wamble's photographic memory and mental astuteness have become something of a legend at Midwestern. Throughout his 32-year-career at the seminary, students have claimed the professor could end a lecture in mid-sentence one day, then complete the sentence at the beginning of the lecture period the following day.

Students are quick to warn campus newcomers of the difficulty of the professor's demanding church history exams, and many solemnly declare they have been "Wamble-ized" when they pass his courses.

Recently, in chapel service which recognized Wamble's contributions to Midwestern, students, faculty and staff packed the seminary auditorium to honor Wamble.

Members of Midwestern's 1991 senior class collected letters of appreciation from the seminary community and presented the bound letters to the professor during the chapel service. Several students expressed words of affirmation for Wamble during the service, and talked about meaningful experiences they had encountered as his church history students.

Wamble then addressed the crowd of well-wishers and told the students he was moved by their expression of love for him.

"Teaching church history to seminary students makes one perennially young," he said, "because it permits me to go somehow with the life of those students who have been in my class. . . . Your ministry is the capstone and crown of mine, and I depend greatly on you for fulfillment of that ministry."

During his years at Midwestern, Wamble has become known among the wider circle of Southern Baptists as a champion for religious liberty issues. His interest in the principles of church-state separation goes back to his high school days, when Wamble recalls memorizing the entire U.S. Constitution.

"I became a nut for constitutional history," he said, "and thought much about the great principles for which our country stand."

A self-taught lawyer, Wamble contributed to a case which was decided as a result of a U.S. Supreme Court religious liberty decision made in 1985.

His involvement in the case began in 1977, when he filed suit against the U.S. Commissioner of Education to prevent the federal government from using a private contractor to place federally-funded teachers in Missouri parochial schools. The case, Wamble v. Bell, came to trial in 1982, challenging the constitutionality of the administration of Missouri's Title I "bypass" program. Wamble personally argued the case before U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Stevens Jr.

In 1984, Judge Stevens ruled the practice in Missouri did, in fact, violate the constitutional separation of church and state. But Stevens then stayed the injunction pending the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on a similar New York case. In 1985, the nation's highest court ruled on the New York case, finding such parochial aid to be a clear violation of the separation of church and state.

Following that decision, in 1985 Judge Stevens lifted the stay of injunction imposed on the Missouri case. After an eight-year odyssey, Wamble v. Bell became a closed case.

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In another religious liberty case, Wamble joined Rudy Pulido, a St. Louis pastor, in filing suit against the U.S. Secretary of Education in 1985, challenging guidelines established for allocating federal education funds to parochial schools. Four years later, Judge Stevens' decision in the Pulido v. Cavazos case found the federal funding plan to be an unconstitutional violation of church-state separation.

On the state convention level, Wamble's service to Missouri Baptists has been extensive. He was elected president of the Missouri Baptist Convention in 1973 and re-elected in 1974. When he accepted the position, he became the second seminary professor to be president of a state Southern Baptist convention in this century.

Wamble also served the MBC as a lobbyist on church-state matters for eight years. In addition, he was a member of the Missouri Baptist Christian Life Commission for many years and was chairman of the commission from 1971-74.

During his years at Midwestern, Wamble also has held numerous interim pastorates in Missouri Baptist churches.

Recently, both the Missouri Baptist Convention executive board and Midwestern Seminary trustees passed resolutions honoring Wamble and expressing appreciation for his many contributions to the seminary and to the larger Baptist fellowship. In addition, Midwestern's national alumni association voted to name Wamble a 1991 "Honorary Alumnus" of the institution.

During the April meeting of Midwestern's trustees, the board approved Wamble's request for retirement, at a date yet to be specified, and voted to appoint him as "senior professor of church history" upon his retirement.

Midwestern President Milton Ferguson noted Wamble is dealing with his illness with a "characteristic strength of faith," and added, "Dr. Wamble continues to have his keen sense of humor and his intellectual concern for precision and accuracy. He also seeks every opportunity to express his gratitude and love for the many students he has taught, the colleagues with whom he has worked, and the friends in churches where he has served."

During the recent seminary chapel service honoring Wamble, the professor urged students to follow God's leadership and "walk in all his ways."

"Some of you are aware that I have spent a considerable portion of my life contending for the concept of liberty of conscience," he said. "Conscience is that place where God makes contact with you, and conscience is that place where you are able to interact with God and to become your own person."

Wamble urged the students, "Remember that God alone is sovereign of the conscience, and it is in that conscience that God will give you a shining light. Guard it. Let nothing dim it. Follow it when you see it.

"Nothing will please me greater as I view you from the palisades of heaven than to see you faithfully following the conscience which God has shaped in you."