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92-12

Court to hear abortion case;
Roe near end, both sides say

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court's announcement it will hear arguments concerning a state abortion-restriction law elicited one area of agreement among pro-life and pro-choice advocates -- the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision declaring a constitutionally protected right to abortion is near its demise.

"Roe's days are numbered," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "It is only a matter of time until the court puts an end to the national disgrace of abortion on demand. We hope Roe has no 20th anniversary."

"We are on the edge of a legal precipice, facing a future without the right to choose," said Kate Michelman, executive director of the National Abortion Rights Action League. "Losing this right is no longer distant and inconceivable -- because of President Bush, it is immediate and inevitable."

On Jan. 21, the eve of the 19th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court announced it had agreed to review Planned Parenthood v. Casey. In the case, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals upheld most of the provisions of the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act, including informed consent with a 24-hour waiting period before an abortion, parental consent for minors, a ban on abortions after the 24th week of pregnancy except for severe health problems in the mother and a prohibition on sex-selection abortions. The appeals court struck down a section requiring women to notify their husbands before the abortion.

In its orders granting a hearing to the case, the Supreme Court seemed to indicate it may limit its ruling to the restrictions involved in the law and not rule on the constitutionality of Roe. Lawyers for pro-life organizations differed somewhat on what the court would do.

"Basically, they've left us guessing as to what they've done," said Leanne McCoy, a lawyer for Americans United for Life, recognized as the legal arm of the pro-life movement. "It sounds narrow by the way they've worded it, but they're not exactly limiting themselves" from considering the broader issues.

"I think there's a good likelihood" the court will deal with Roe in some manner, McCoy said.

Even if the court does not reverse Roe in the Pennsylvania case, both sides of the debate have indicated they believe it will be overturned soon, probably in the following term, in cases involving statutes in Louisiana, Utah and the territory of Guam.

A failure to reverse Roe in the Pennsylvania case would not be all bad, said Richard Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission.

"I, like most Southern Baptists, continue to pray for Roe's reversal and a reassertion of the sanctity of life ethic which has prevailed in our nation throughout most of its history," Land said. "Even if the court decides to not revisit Roe but to look at the narrow issues of this particular case, it is a tremendous plus for pro-life advocates.

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"What are the issues in this case? Spousal notification, parental consent and informed consent of the patient who is determining whether to have an abortion. A CNN poll released Jan. 21 shows that 73 percent of the American people support spousal notification and 70 percent support parental consent for minors and a majority feels that patients, even pregnant women, should have the information to give informed consent," Land said.

"It cannot be anything but beneficial to have a discussion of these issues in an election year and to have Planned Parenthood unmasked as being vigorously opposed to all three."

The court is expected to hear arguments in the case in April. A decision is expected to be released by July. Pro-choicers expect a loss, regardless of whether the justices reconsider Roe.

"When I argue this case before the Supreme Court, I will urge the justices to once again forcefully reaffirm a woman's right to choose abortion," said Kathryn Kolbert, the American Civil Liberties Union lawyer handling the case for Planned Parenthood.

"But President Bush has done all he could to ensure that my arguments are likely to fall on deaf ears. Over the last several years, he has packed the court with justices who are hostile to a woman's right to make private decisions about childbearing," Kolbert said.

On Jan. 21, both the ACLU and the National Abortion Rights Action League announced campaigns to restore the right to abortion if and when Roe is reversed. The ACLU will lobby aggressively for passage of the Freedom of Choice Act, a bill in Congress which not only would legislate abortion on demand but prevent states from enacting restrictions now allowed by the court. The ACLU also plans to begin drafting a constitutional amendment providing abortion rights, a spokesman said.

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Romanian denies 'deal'
with FMB trustees

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ATLANTA (BP)--Romanian Baptist leader Nic Gheorghita has denied involvement in any "deal" to support the controversial Southern Baptist defunding of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Switzerland in return for major funding for Romanian schools.

But he acknowledged a possible misuse of English, which is not his primary language, may have caused a misunderstanding.

In a Jan. 22 interview with Associated Baptist Press, Gheorghita denied telling Southern Baptist missionary Charles "T" Thomas that Romanian Baptists were "first in line" for the money cut by Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees from the 1992 budget of the seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

"Definitely no, and I am sorry to hear this," said Gheorghita, general secretary of the Romanian Baptist Union, who was contacted in Atlanta while traveling in the United States. "If (Thomas) said this, I have a big question mark He has to answer for that."

Gheorghita said he probably discussed the Ruschlikon money with Thomas. Since the discussion would have been in English, the Romanian executive suggested: "I could have said something that seemed to express that the money will come to Romania."

Gheorghita also denied he and Vasile Talos, Romanian union president, were involved in a "deal" to exchange endorsement of the Foreign Mission Board trustees' defunding of Ruschlikon for money for Romanian schools.

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"They did not try to buy us," he told ABP.

Thomas and his wife, Kathie, Southern Baptist missionaries for 17 years, have resigned from service in Romania to express their opposition to what they term "a hostile takeover" of the Foreign Mission Board by conservatives.

In their resignation letter, the Thomases also noted the Romanian Baptist Union "has chosen to support the conservative movement" within the SBC and the mission board.

"This decision was motivated by promises of massive funding in return for their support," the missionaries charged. "This is both disgusting and immoral, and we cannot condone -- even in a passive way -- this action."

In December Gheorghita and Talos sent a letter to the Foreign Mission Board stating that the general council of the Romanian union had met Nov. 26 and agreed to support the FMB trustees' defunding action. It also outlined concerns the Romanians have about the Ruschlikon seminary's perceived theological liberalism.

Thomas told Baptist Press that after the Romanian letter was sent, Gheorghita told him, "Well, this puts us first in line to get all the money for Ruschlikon." (Baptist Press, which first reported the Thomas resignation, was not able to reach Gheorghita for comment at that time.)

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Urgent call issued
for China personnel

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press
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HONG KONG (BP)--Southern Baptists' priority to meet opportunities in newly opened Soviet and Eastern European states may have taken the spotlight off work in China, steering volunteers away from growing opportunities there.

Hong Kong-based officials with Cooperative Services International are issuing an urgent plea for more workers in China. The Southern Baptist humanitarian aid organization asks Southern Baptists not to lose sight of CSI's China efforts in their rush to help Eastern Europeans behind the now-crumbled Iron Curtain.

"Southern Baptists have adequate resources to support both these tremendously needy regions of the world," said Jack Shelby, who directs CSI's China teaching program. "But response to our personnel requests for China has been very weak. Some of that can be attributed to the Tiananmen Square incident three years ago. But our shortfall in teachers also coincides with the opening of Eastern Europe" to Western aid.

Response to CSI's China work threatens to hit a three-year low. Chinese universities have asked CSI to provide 123 teachers for the 1992-93 school year. But so far, just three people have agreed to teach in China this fall.

Those requests for teachers are "the most we've ever had from China in a single year," Shelby added. "Our program is becoming well known and respect for our teachers' work is growing among university administrators across China. There's a real demand for our people.

"But we've refrained from beating the bushes to get slots for teachers because we don't have personnel to fill requests we have in hand. We could easily get 400 requests for teachers but we haven't encouraged our China contacts to ask for more. We obviously can't keep the program going if we don't have people to fill teaching positions."

Southern Baptists sent just 46 teachers to China last year -- the lowest total in three years. And 25 of those -- more than half -- will complete assignments after this school year and won't return in the fall.

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The agency has requested 50 volunteers to work in China for a six-week term this summer, including travel and orientation. But Southern Baptists have filled only about half those requests. CSI hopes to place six teams in China this summer to lead training courses for English teachers from Chinese middle schools and universities.

"We're looking for experienced primary, junior and senior high school or university English teachers," Shelby said, "or others with degrees in English, ESL (English as a second language) or English literature. As policy, Chinese universities don't like to accept foreign teachers over 68 years old so we can take people up to that age in our program. That's a Chinese rule, not our rule."

People interested in CSI's summer teaching program should immediately contact Bill Peacock or Anita Mahoney in CSI's Richmond, Va., office, telephone (804) 353-0151.

CSI offers slots for long-term personnel, too. People interested in working in China as International Service Corps volunteers -- six months to three years -- may contact Glenn Prescott, ISC associate director, or Pat Parrish, CSI administrative assistant, at (804) 254-9418. CSI also has career openings for people who want to stay longer than 3 years.

"Many of our teachers say they've rediscovered the joy of teaching in China," Shelby said. "They find Chinese students more responsive and eager to learn than students typically are in the United States. They enjoy teaching more from that standpoint. Our teachers also have told us repeatedly they have more opportunities to witness in China than in their classrooms at home."

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Theologian Dale Moody
dies of heart attack

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Dale Moody, noted Southern Baptist theologian and professor, died Jan. 22 from a heart attack.

Moody, who would have turned 77 on Jan. 27, was a faculty member at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., from 1948-84. He suffered the fatal attack in a Louisville hospital less than an hour before he was scheduled to undergo a heart bypass operation.

A native of Stamford, Texas, and a graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Moody earned master's and doctorate degrees in theology from Southern Seminary and a doctor of philosophy degree from Oxford University in England. His preparation also included periods of study with famed theologians Paul Tillich, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

Moody's contributions as a writing theologian included eight books and numerous journal articles. His 1981 book "The Word of Truth" was the first systematic theology written by a Southern Baptist seminary professor in more than 40 years. His other books included "The Hope of Glory," "Baptism: Foundation for Christian Unity" and "Spirit of the Living God."

Although Moody enjoyed wide renown in Southern Baptist life and beyond, he was at times controversial and his classroom career at Southern Seminary ended amid theological conflict in 1983. He drew criticism for his belief in the possibility of apostasy (or "falling from grace"), a view that runs counter to the seminary's statement of faith, the Abstract of Principles, and the commonly-held Southern Baptist belief in eternal security. Moody, who at the time was teaching as a senior professor under a series of short-term contracts, was granted a leave of absence by seminary trustees until 1984. His teaching contract was not renewed afterwards. Nevertheless, the school honored him in 1988 by naming him emeritus professor of Christian theology.

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As a classroom teacher, Moody was "one of the most entertaining and stimulating lecturers we have ever had," said his longtime friend and teaching colleague Wayne Ward. "He had such passionate beliefs and had read so widely that he motivated students to dig and to study."

Moody's broad expertise in biblical theology and engaging teaching style made him much in demand as a speaker in settings ranging from scholarly ecumenical gatherings to local congregations. In 1969-70, he became the second Protestant and the first Baptist invited to lecture at the Gregorian University in Rome. He was a research professor at the Institute for Advanced Theological Study in Jerusalem in 1973 and 1976. During the 1960s and '70s, he served as a member of the Faith and Order Commission of The World Council of Churches.

"Dale opened up Southern Baptists to ecumenical theology," Ward said. "Yet he engaged in ecumenical dialogue as a dyed-in-the-wool Texas Southern Baptist."

In Southern Baptist churches, Moody sometimes taught between 20 to 40 Bible studies annually and was a frequent guest preacher. "He had a rare gift for carrying theology to the pews," Ward said. "He was much loved in the churches and he was so powerfully persuasive that, as far as I know, nobody in the churches took strong issue with him."

"The death of Professor Dale Moody marks the passing of a premier member of the faculty whose life-long contribution places him among a select group of stellar professors," said Southern Seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt, adding as a beginning seminary student he took every class Dale Moody taught and read books Moody recommended. "I continued throughout my life to respect him for his scholarship, his love for the church and the seminary and especially for his devotion to his calling as a minister of the gospel and professor of theology."

Moody's family requests that memorial gifts be sent to the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond or the Crusade for Children in Louisville.

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New Age movements present
'serious theological error'

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
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ATLANTA (BP)--New Age movements are among the "most serious theological errors Christianity has ever faced," claims an interfaith witness specialist.

The problem is compounded as most Southern Baptists "don't want to bother with something if they don't agree with it," says Maurice Smith, associate director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board interfaith witness department. "That attitude is going to kill us."

Various New Age movements have been in the United States since the 1960s, Smith said, but it was 1984 before an article appeared in a Southern Baptist publication about the belief system.

"New Age" is an informal name for a variety of groups, Smith says. New Age adherents have no written statement of faith, though their beliefs are closely tied to Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

Smith describes New Age as an "alternative world view." One of its characteristics is the belief that "all is one" -- everything from people to water to energy are a unitary whole.

That belief leads to the next common New Age view that everything, including each individual, is god.

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"If I had to put my finger on one reason New Age is popular, it is the belief that you are god," Smith says. When a person believes he is god, he can determine what is right and wrong.

"If you can ritualize your lusts, you have the ultimate religion," Smith says. "New Age is the ultimate do-it-yourself religious system."

People involved in New Age movements are likely to be interested in Christianity because they believe all religions are true. The diversity of religions is explained as people taking different paths to find the god within themselves.

Yet New Age adherents reject religious claims that are exclusive. For example, they deny that Jesus is the only way to salvation and the Bible is authoritative Scripture.

Smith says people in New Age movements are told not to believe anything until they have experienced it. He says that can be the point of witness for Christians, as they share their personal experience with God.

New Age groups promise to help people "explore unfamiliar subject matters in an open environment," Smith says. "In other words, they'll expose you to things you wouldn't accept if you stuck to your convictions."

However, Smith says that most people are not brain-washed into accepting New Age ideas. "People get into New Age because they choose to. They walk in, usually because of the enthusiasm of some friend or acquaintance."

Because New Age movements do not have centralized headquarters, it is impossible to determine the number of people involved in New Age, Smith says.

Yet people who are aware of New Age ideas can find evidence of the movements everywhere, Smith believes. He has a list of 10 bookstores in Atlanta oriented toward New Age materials and he says that is only a partial list.

Common expressions of New Age ideas are integration of the body, mind and spirit, claims of a changed consciousness, the need to be world affirming or life affirming and an emphasis on meditation. However, those phrases do not always indicate a New Age group.

Smith notes that people following New Age beliefs are typically concerned about environmental issues but not all environmental groups stem from New Age movements.

The January 1993 discipleship training material produced by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board will include a study of New Age movements, Smith says. Southern Baptists wanting more information on New Age movements can contact Smith or the interfaith witness coordinator in their state convention office.

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Ongoing Memphis prison ministry
involves volunteers, gets results

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
1/23/92

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Larry Creasman knows that organization and commitment are the keys to reaching persons through ministry to prison inmates, and he has the numbers to prove it.

As a result of the most recent revival at Memphis' Shelby County Correctional Center, 261 inmates accepted Christ as Savior and hundreds more came forward in rededication.

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Creasman, a retired U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employee from Hernando, Miss., is a member of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's National Fellowship of Baptists in Missions through the Shelby Baptist Criminal Justice Fellowship.

Working under the leadership of the Shelby Baptist Association, Creasman and his associates in the fellowship help perform an ongoing ministry to more than 9,000 inmates in city, county, state and federal jails throughout the Memphis area, offering twice-weekly worship services, counseling and special holiday programs.

Creasman, a member of Memphis' Bellevue Baptist Church, said the success of the "Victory in Jesus" revival was the product of this year-round ministry, with the addition of prayer, confession and plenty of advance planning.

"The Shelby County Correctional Center complex is the largest county jail in the United States, with about 3,000 men and women inmates," said Creasman, who served as event chairman. "After meeting with the prison administrators, all of them extremely cooperative, we decided we'd have two complete worship services at five different locations within the complex. So we had to locate five evangelists, five song leaders, five musicians or groups and a host of counselors."

They spanned the full theological and racial spectrum of Southern Baptist life in greater Memphis. Evangelists ranged from Dr. R. Paul Caudill, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, to James Vail, a student at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary.

"We had two white evangelists and three black, three white song leaders and two blacks and our counselors were almost evenly distributed between the races," Creasman said.

Rev. Bill Hendry, director of the military ministry at Memphis' Bellevue Baptist Church, trained the prospective counselors at three locations around the city. Each volunteer had to undergo a security check for prior criminal activity and decide the times and locations they would be serving, again for security reasons.

In another concession to security, the inmates filled out commitment cards after returning to their cellblocks rather than at the conclusion of services. Follow-up made with individual inmates later.

To drum up interest among inmates, organizers used mealtime announcements, posters throughout the prison compound, visitation in cellblocks and "special interest clinics" on topics including how to read the Bible, marriage and family relationships and sports with a Christian emphasis.

"The opportunity for failure was tremendous but it was a miracle how smoothly the revival worked out. And the results speak for themselves," Creasman said.

He urged others to consider prison ministry as an avenue for missions involvement, adding that concern for one's personal safety is misplaced.

"You can deal in a prison environment without fear because there's always security present. In fact, you're more protected in a prison these days than you are in the average shopping center parking lot," he said.

Creasman said the thrust of the Memphis prison ministry program is to "reach the lost and restore others to fellowship with the Lord and with other Christians." The spiritual awakening and renewal, he believes, can have a real impact on society at large.

"It costs about \$20,000 per year, on the average, just to house one inmate in this country and \$80,000 for just one prison bed. The economics of it are such that we can't keep building more prisons.

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"But when you have a changed heart, you have a changed lifestyle," Creasman said. "And if you get a man saved, he doesn't go back to jail. That's our feeling."

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Yorktown church clears red tape
to build senior housing

By Marv Knox

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Yorktown Baptist Church has cleared away a forest of red tape to build a senior adult housing complex on a next-door vacant lot.

Pastor Dale Thompson discovered the need for the 50-unit apartment building shortly after he came to the church in December 1986.

As he got to know elderly residents of the community, he learned that many of them either live in substandard housing or spend too much of their income on homes or apartments. The problem also puts a financial strain on many of their children, who feel the pinch of helping their parents while raising their own families.

The solution seemed simple, Thompson recalled: The church could help the senior adults by providing low-cost quality housing.

Unfortunately, one problem seemed almost insurmountable. Property and construction costs were beyond the means of the small church, which now attracts about 100 people to Sunday morning worship.

An engineer by training, Thompson started working on one aspect of the problem at a time. He convinced Ken George, a member of Shively Baptist Church, to donate 8.5 acres of property to the church on National Turnpike. That was a second gift for contractor/developer George, who also donated the church's current site.

Then Thompson and Yorktown began chopping down the red tape of government bureaucracy. Working with a consultant and Christian Church Homes of Kentucky, they applied for a loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The loan application and accompanying legal documents stand close to one foot high.

"I prayed over that application every night from June to September of 1990," Thompson recalled, also remembering he wept when he heard the application had been accepted. "I thought it was impossible. But we received approval for 50 of 98 units awarded to the whole state that year."

When all the paperwork was done, HUD provided a loan for \$2.11 million. The church broke ground Jan. 12 and the building is to be completed by mid-August. The church left the loan closing with more than enough money to buy a bus for the senior adult ministry.

"The whole idea is part of our concept of doing something more than exist," Thompson said. "The church cannot just do maintenance and thrive.

"We're a church of middle-class two-income families with aging parents and young children. People feel guilty because they don't have enough time for either their parents or their children. If we can minister to their elderly parents by giving them affordable housing, help with grocery shopping, activities and independence, we can take some of the pressure off.

"It's going to change the church dramatically," Thompson predicted. "Instead of just holding worship, this church is going to give itself away to the community."

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Western Recorder, newsjournal of The Kentucky Baptist Convention.