

Court That Criminalized Home Schooling Revisits Case

A California court decided on Tuesday to reconsider the decision it made to criminalize parents for home schooling their children.



[] A California appeals court decided on Tuesday to reconsider the decision it made last month that criminalized parents for home schooling their children without being credentialed by the state.

The Feb. 28 ruling by Second District Court of Appeal in Los Angeles set off a firestorm of controversy among citizens and politicians alike over the last four weeks, including a successful petition campaign by a home-schooling advocacy group that swiftly garnered 250,000 signatures.

“Another look at this case will help ensure that the fundamental rights of parents are fully protected,” Gary Kleep, an attorney with the U.S. Justice Foundation and the father of the home-schooled children in the case, told the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

It is not unusual for the appeals court to reconsider decisions, but it is unusual for the outcome to dramatically change, reported the *Chronicle*. The judges from the California appeals court suggested that the decision could be completely rewritten.

The California case has attracted national attention and conservative leaders across the country applauded the appeals court’s decision this week to take another look at the issue. “I firmly believe that parents have the right and responsibility to oversee the education of their children,” commented Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback.

“Home schooling is a proven method of education, and has been for generations,” he added. “Governmental bodies should not try to sweep away the options of parents to teach their children.”

The new hearing is scheduled for June.

Church of God Leader Charles Conn Dies

Charles W. Conn, a prominent leader in the Church of God, died March 18, four days after suffering a heart attack. He was 88. Funeral services were held in Cleveland, Tenn.



[] Charles William Conn, a prominent leader in the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), died March 18, four days after suffering a heart attack. He was 88. For several decades Conn served in many high-ranking positions within the Pentecostal denomination, including as general overseer from 1966-1970 and president of its flagship school, Lee College, from 1970-1982.

He was also the denomination’s official historian, in part for comprehensively examining the church’s roots in his 1955 book, *Like a Mighty Army*.

“Dr. Conn strategically impacted the church and the Pentecostal world,” said Dennis McGuire, current general overseer of the Church of God. “His influence and legacy will endure for generations to come.”

Conn was preceded in death by his wife, Edna, and two of their daughters. He is survived by 10 children, including Paul Conn, who is president of what is now called Lee University; 31 grandchildren and 37 great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were held in Cleveland, Tenn., on March 22.

California Court Criminalizes Home Schooling

The founder of the World Congress of Families says the decision was “blatantly anti-family” and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger calls it “outrageous.”



[] The founder of the World Congress of Families is infuriated over a California court’s recent decision making criminals out of parents who home school their children without state licensing.

“It’s an attempt to cut off escape routes to families fleeing the public education system,” said Allan Carlson, the organization’s founder. “This had nothing to do with the quality of home schooling. Home-school graduates tend to score higher on aptitude tests than products of public education. Students schooled at home frequently attend the best Ivy League colleges and universities.”

Carlson believes the decision is “blatantly anti-family” and commended California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is often liberal on social issues, for calling the ruling “outrageous.”

The controversy came after California appeals court Judge H. Walt Croskey ruled last month that home schooling is illegal unless administered by a credentialed teacher, igniting a firestorm of outrage among advocates of home schooling.

But officials at the California Department of Education appeared at least unwilling to immediately enforce the new

ruling, which would conceivably lead to unlicensed parent teachers being imprisoned.

“I want to assure parents that chose to home school that California Department of Education policy will not change in any way as a result of this ruling,” said Jack O’Connell, the state’s superintendent of public instruction. “Parents still have the right to home school in our state.”

Though O’Connell said he respected the right of a parent to home school their child instead of sending them to a public or private school, it was not clear if some pending process of credentialing would render it a conditional right for future home schoolers.

The case prompted an immediate petition drive by the Virginia-based Home School Legal Defense Association, which quickly garnered the 250,000 signatures needed in its ongoing attempt to overturn the decision.

Police Raid Christian Bookstore in Egypt

Egyptian police recently raided an Egyptian Christian bookstore. They arrested an employee and confiscated books, compact discs and issues of a Christian newspaper.



[] Egyptian police recently arrested an Egyptian Christian bookstore employee, confiscating books, compact discs and issues of a Christian newspaper, according to Advocates For The Persecuted (AFTP).

David Joseph—chief editor of *Al Tareek Wa Al Haque* (The Way and The Truth), the only newspaper serving the Christian

minority community in Egypt—said that eight undercover policemen stormed into the Nile Christian Book Shop, March 15, and arrested Shenouda Armia Bakhait, Assist News Service (ANS) reported.

Bakhait was released the following day after posting bail, but Egyptian authorities reportedly will issue a summons for him to appear in court. It is not clear what formal accusations have been made, said AFTP, a nonprofit organization that advocates for religious minorities in the Middle East.

Joseph is president of the Egyptian Christian Youth Union, which runs the Nile Christian Book Shop, owned by The Church of God in Egypt. A native Egyptian and American citizen, Joseph is also president of AFTP.

AFTP Executive Director Jan Fletcher said Bakhait's arrest came one day after Mohammed Hegazy visited the bookstore. Hegazy is the first Egyptian Muslim convert to Christianity to petition Egypt's Administrative Court to change his religious affiliation on his national identity card, ANS reported.

A hearing on the petition sparked a melee in an Egyptian courtroom in January, when a judge denied Hegazy's request, ruling that it was against Islamic law for a Muslim to leave Islam, ANS reported. — **Christian Retailing**

Historic Meeting Planned at UN Headquarters

Christian and Jewish leaders will convene in Manhattan at the United Nations headquarters on May 15 to honor the 60-year anniversary of the modern state of Israel.



[] Christian and Jewish leaders will convene in Manhattan at the United Nations (UN) headquarters on May 15 to honor the 60-year anniversary of the modern state of Israel.

“We are gathering at the seat of global influence, Jews and Christians, united in prayer and solidarity, to celebrate Israel,” said Robert Stearns, executive director of Eagles Wings Ministries and co-sponsor of the event.

The evening will include keynote addresses from Asaf Shariv, Israeli consul general to New York; John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel; and Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi of Efrat in Israel.

“Evangelical Christians and Jewish people are standing together declaring a God of love not hatred—and calling for peace, not violence,” said Riskin.

To be held in the Delegate’s Hall of the UN, organizers of this year’s Jerusalem Prayer Banquet hailed it as a rare chance for Jews and Christians to articulate their support for Israel. It was UN General Assembly Resolution 181 that on May 14, 1948 deeded the Jewish homeland to a tiny remnant of Jews, many of them survivors of Nazi Germany.

Leaders said the location is also noteworthy because it is the platform given last year to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has called for Israel's destruction and has denied the veracity of the Holocaust.

“I do not know of any other point in history,” said Stearns, “where Jews and Christians have joined together at the United Nations in this way, to lift their voices in prayer and declaration for Zion.”

Other Christian leaders scheduled to attend include: constitutional law expert Jay Sekulow; Lou Engle, founder of TheCall; publisher Stephen Strang; Fred Price, founder of Crenshaw Christian Center; Larry Kreider, apostolic leader and founder of DOVE Fellowship; Michael Little, president of the Christian Broadcasting Network; and many more.

For more information visit or call 1-800-519-4647.

Court Hears Case for Praying “In Jesus Name”™

Arguments that would allow citizens the freedom to pray 'in Jesus name' during a government event were heard recently in the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.



[] The Rev. Hashmel Turner, a member of the city council in Fredericksburg, Va., routinely prayed during the council meetings. He often ended his prayers by invoking the name of Christ. Some attendees at the meetings were offended and threatened legal action.

The council yielded and adopted a policy of “nondenominational” prayers, which excluded explicit mention of Jesus.

Last week the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals were asked to grant Turner and others the freedom to pray as they please.

John Whitehead, the founder and chief of The Rutherford Institute—a civil liberties advocacy group that is backing Turner—said the ban is unacceptable.

“There are some things in life that cannot be compromised,” Whitehead said. “For Hashmel Turner, his faith, his integrity and his civil liberties are three things worth fighting for.” Hashmel’s attorneys rendered their oral arguments last Wednesday and are currently awaiting a decision from the court.

Easter Picture Unites English Community

A central England town has united a multi-faith community—by encouraging them to paint the Easter story. Muslim and Hindu children have been asking to be told the story of Christ's resurrection.



[] Pentecostal pastors in a central England town have united a multi-faith community—by encouraging them to paint the Easter story. They also hope to smash a world record in the process.

Phil Weaver and Dave Holmes—who lead New Springs International Christian Church, Loughborough—came up with the idea of using a huge picture to involve the wider community in celebrating Easter.

Part of a nationwide mission called Hope 2008, the project has exploded—with more than 500 people using 2,500 pots of paint to create the picture, which is longer than the length of a football field and taller than a two-story house.

Involving more than 20 churches in the town, the picture could break the record of being the biggest “painting-by-numbers” in the world. It has already been featured on local BBC TV and radio.

Artist Terry Woods, a member of New Springs, drew the Easter scenes, which were traced onto boards using laptop computers and projectors. The boards were then sent out for painting by schools, churches and community groups.

Called *The Bigger Picture*, it has drawn people from other faiths. “Children at the schools—regardless of whether they’re Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs—have been painting the boards and

wanting to know the story," Holmes said.

The boards are being put up on a huge frame—made up of two miles of scaffolding—in a field next to a local church. A big party will be held there the day after Easter Sunday, and the picture will stay up for another week.

"One school said, 'It has inspired the whole of the school,'" Holmes explained, "'and we've done nothing at school but talk about Christ.'" Church pastors believe God has been "constantly guiding" them all the way.

"There's just been an incredible openness for this to take place," Holmes added (visit). —Clive Price in England

Ministry Fights Spiritual Blindness by Treating Physical Blindness

International Aid, a Christian relief ministry, has built and staffed an eye clinic in Ghana to serve patients trying to survive on little or no money.



[] Of the 20 million people living in Ghana an estimated 40 percent are blind or vision-impaired, according to *Mission Network News* (MNN).

Every year tens of thousands of Ghanaians are suffering vision loss or blindness due to preventable ailments, such as cataracts. International Aid (IA), a Christian relief ministry that provides health care, hopes to help reverse these appalling statistics.

IA has built and staffed an eye clinic to serve patients trying to survive on little or no money in this Third World country, MNN reported.

They provide screenings, surgery and other treatments, and travel to remote villages to render care. The ministry told MNN they not only want to help Ghanans see clearer physically but spritually as well.

“There's a lot of Christians who are working at our clinic, so there's that personal ministry,” said Faye Kragt, a manager with IA. “Many of our volunteers are Christians. When they go to surgery, our doctors there pray with the staff and the patients, and there's many ways to be able to do that. We try to make sure that it's not just in word, but it's in deed.”

Grassley Gives 3 Ministries March 31 Deadline

Senator Charles Grassley set a new deadline for Kenneth Copeland, Eddie Long and Creflo Dollar to provide documents that may clear up suspicions that they have mishandled donations.



[] In a new round of letters sent out last week by Senators Charles Grassley and Max Baucus, the respective ranking Republican and Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, a new deadline was given to Kenneth Copeland, Eddie Long and Creflo Dollar—three of the six televangelist ministries that Sen. Grassley's office said have thus far not sufficiently turned over tax-related information he originally requested last November.

The three ministries were asked to respond and show a willingness to cooperate by March 31. The documents, if provided by the ministries, would allegedly help clear up Sen. Grassley's suspicions that the TV-based ministries have mishandled or misused tax-exempt donations.

Of the three other ministries at the center of his investigation, Grassley said Joyce Meyer has "cooperated substantially," Benny Hinn answered "five of 28 questions so far" and Randy and Paula White have verbally indicated they will cooperate.

Another significant development in the query was the decision by Senator Baucus, a Democrat from Montana and the committee's chairman, to join Grassley's investigation. Without the support of Baucus, Grassley could have run into problems if obtaining subpoenas to deal with ministries that refuse to cooperate becomes a necessary component of the investigation.

Bishop Weeks Pleads Guilty to Felony Assault

In a plea bargain agreement Bishop Thomas Weeks III pleaded guilty on Tuesday to aggravated assault for pushing and kicking his wife, evangelist Juanita Bynum.



[] In a plea bargain agreement Bishop Thomas Weeks III, head of Global Destiny Ministries, pleaded guilty on Tuesday to aggravated assault for pushing and kicking his wife, evangelist Juanita Bynum, in the parking lot of an Atlanta hotel last August.

The dramatic turnaround in the high-profile criminal case came after Weeks, separated from contact with Bynum by a restraining order issued last summer, met with his wife

shortly after divorce proceedings on Monday and the two “fell into each other’s arms,” reported the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC).

Bynum said she softened toward Weeks after realizing she still had feelings for her husband, who later apologized and thanked his wife in court.

In exchange for Weeks’ guilty plea to the felony charge of aggravated assault the court ordered him to three years’ probation, 200 hours of non-church related community service and anger-management counseling, reported the *AJC*.

Bynum also said she was compelled to ask the court that her husband receive no jail time after Weeks’ grandfather called her to intervene. What happened with the divorce proceedings, or if the two decide to reconcile, was not yet made clear by the couple.