

Dangers of trusting the clergy

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Posted by Matt (65.65.183.187) on November 27, 2002 at 15:39:09:

Here is a great example of how church "protects" our children.

CHURCHES SHIFT ABUSE DEFENSES

18-May-94 Denver Post: Holding Groups Responsible 'violates religious freedom.' By Virginia Culver

Attorneys for three local church organizations that recently lost court cases involving sexual misconduct by clergy claim that holding churches accountable for ministers' conduct robs them of their religious freedom.

In "friend of the court" briefs filed this month with the US Supreme Court, attorneys in two Denver United Methodist cases and a third involving Denver's Bear Valley Church of Christ say lower-court rulings making churches liable for ministers' actions violate the First Amendment by restricting the churches "free exercise of religion".

The attorneys said that telling churches how to "select, assign, supervise and discipline clergy, and how religious organizations may conduct their administration and how a clergy person does pastoral counseling" violates the First Amendment.

Questioning how churches operate "directly interferes with the institutions' free exercise of religion," the attorneys charge.

The legal arguments were filed in defense of the Colorado Episcopal Diocese and its appeal of a sexual misconduct case. In that case, the diocese is appealing to the US Court of Appeals a \$728,000 judgment to Mary Moses Tenantry. She alleged that a sexual relationship with her priest, the Rev. Paul Robinson, cause her extreme, psychological and spiritual harm.

Tenantry and Robinson became involved when he was an associate past of St. Philip and St. James Episcopal Church in southwest Denver.

A jury awarded her \$1.2 million from the diocese in 1991. The diocese appealed that decision to the Colorado Supreme Court, which reduced the judgment to \$728,000.

The United Methodist cases, both this year, involved Dianne R. Winkler of Aurora and Christa Bohrer of Denver.

Winkler was awarded more than \$163,000 in January by a Denver District Court jury in her civil suit against the Rev. Glenn Chambers, former pastor of Grace United Methodist Church in southeast Denver. She alleged sexual harassment. Chambers and the church appealed the verdict to the Colorado Court of Appeals this month.

Bohrer was awarded more than \$700,000 in her civil suit in Denver District against former minister Daniel DeHart and the United Methodist Annual Conference (the equivalent of a diocese). She alleged DeHart seduced her into a sexual relationship when she was 13 and he was youth minister at First Methodist Church in Greeley.

In the Church of Christ suit in 1992, a Dever woman and her son were awarded \$450,000 by a Denver District Court jury. The woman, whose son was a minor at the time, claimed the minister, Homer Wolfe, inappropriately massaged and fondled him during counseling sessions for five years. That case is before the Colorado Court of Appeals.

In all three judgments, juries concluded church officials failed to properly screen, hire and supervise the ministers. All three juries also ordered the church or conference to pay at least half the damages.

Friend of the court briefs are filed by parties who stand to be materially affected by the outcome of a pending decision--in this case, the high court's decision about whether to review the Tenantry case. In their briefs, the church attorneys threaten to appeal their judgments--to the US Court of Appeals, if necessary.

But an expert in constitutional law at the University of Dever said he doubts the First Amendment claims will get anywhere.

Stephen Pepper, BU law professor, said for the government to say how a religion chooses its rabbi or priest "gets into the freedom of religion."

Religious groups do have the right to the free exercise of their religion, he said, in all matters of administration, "but if your minister hurts someone, you'll have to pay," said Pepper.

He called the First Amendment defense "a live issue" that has been used in other church cases, particularly those involving discrimination. "It's kind of a knee-jerk defense."

"But it's pretty hard to defend against statutory rape and sexual harassment," he said.

The attorneys filing the friend of the court briefs are Neil Quigley, who represented the United Methodists in the Bohrer and Winkler cases and the Church of Christ in the third case; and Jim Johnson, attorney for Homer Wolfe.

The attorneys say in the briefs that they have been "involved in many lawsuits in Colorado for almost ten years where religious institutions have had claims against them for sexual improprieties."

Dever attorney Joyce Seelen, who represented Tenantry, Winkler, Bohrer and the woman who sued on behalf of her son, yesterday refused to comment about the recent briefs. Two other briefs supporting the Episcopal diocese and citing the First Amendment argument have been filed with the US Court of Appeals.

The American Association of Pastoral Counselors, headquarters in Virginia, said the lower court "did not understand that pastoral counseling and supervision of parish clergy is not the equivalent to employment supervision."

The other brief was filed by a coalition of Colorado religious groups, including Catholics and Protestants.

KENTUCKY PRIESTS WHO WERE CHARGED WITH OR CONVICTED OF SEX ABUSE

Courier Journal, Monday, December 27, 1993

The Rev. Joseph Pilger, a retired Roman Catholic priest, pleaded innocent to 84 felony counts of sexually abusing four boys 25 years ago. Pilger, 72, has a Jan. 10 pretrial conference scheduled. -- November 1993, Dixon

Monsignor Leonard B. Nienaber, 86, was charged with sexually abusing 24 children while he was pastor of Mary Queen of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Lexington. -- June 1993, Lexington

The Rev. Carl C. Schaffer, a retired Catholic priest, apparently committed suicide a day after a detective questioned him about an abuse allegation. Relatives and friends said that Schaffer's work was demanding and stressful and that he would have been greatly distressed by the allegation; the alleged acts apparently were said to have taken place years ago. Schaffer had been a priest for 36 years in Lexington and in Central and Northern Kentucky before his retirement in 1989. He ran a center for troubled teen-age boys out of his Williamsburg home after his retirement. -- July 1993, Lexington

The Rev. Earl Bierman, a retired Catholic priest who pleaded guilty to sexually abusing boys in Northern Kentucky, was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Campbell Circuit Judge William Wehr ordered Bierman, 61, of Erlanger to spend two to four of those years in a treatment program for sex offenders at the state reformatory in La Grange. Bierman was said to have divulged detailed confessions of parish members as a way to initiate sexual encounters. July 1993, Newport

The Rev. Daniel C. Clark, a Catholic priest, was sentenced to serve three months in prison and remain on probation for 15 years for sexually abusing two boys he counseled at a local parish. Clark had pleaded guilty to one count each of first-degree sexual abuse and second-degree sodomy. -- November 1988, Louisville

Some more examples

Christian televangelist William Wasmus of Church of the Living Savior: had sex with children and video-taped it on church equipment. (Columbus, Ohio, 1994)

Christian Pentacostal evangelist Mario Leyva: sodomized more than 100 little boys. (Columbus, Georgia, 1990)

Christian Chaplan assistant Steven Ritchie: raped a six-year-old girl. (Fort Lewis, Washington, 1990)

Christian evangelist Dom McCary: sodomized four little boys. (Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1992)

Christian Lutheran James Allen Weller: molested several children, some as young as ten years old. (Redwood, City, California, 1991)

Christian deacon Henry Meinholz: raping and suffocating to death a 13-year-old girl. (Kingston, Massachusetts, 1991)

Christian Reverend Lloyd David of First Christian Fellowship: child pornography and sexual abuse of teen-age boys. (Waukegan, Illinois)

Christian Reverend Virgil Carpenter of Bible Missionary Church: sodomized a nine-year-old girl. (Ontario, Oregon)

Christian Presbyterian minister Bruce Brigden: molested 11 girls, some as young as four years old (Alva, Oklahoma)

Christian Reverend Richard Jones of Family Life Church: molested boys and told them the Bible sanctioned the abuse (Park Hills, Missouri, 1994)

Christian youth minister Keith Geren of Wayside Baptist Church: child molestation. (Miami, Florida, 1994)

Christian Fundamentalist school operator Reverend Duane Smith: molesting children (Laporte, Indiana, 1992)

Christian Mormon Sunday-school teacher John Midgett: molesting 8 girls, some only five years old. (California)

Christian Reverend Jon Walker of Springfield Baptist Church: molested a 13 year old girl (California).

Christian Reverend James Randazzo of Spiral of Friends Church: drug use and child molestation (Molina, Colorado, 1989, brought to justice in 1992).

Christian minister and evangelist Tony Alamo recently went to prison for tax evasion. During his trial it was discovered that he had "married" two fifteen-year-old children and was abusing them.

I would think twice about entrusting my children to the church. It seems that churches from a variety of denominations are more concerned with protecting their image than protecting my children.

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