

Later Workers

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Willis Propp

Transcripts of Testimony

January 10, 2023

**Transcript of the Testimony of Willis Propp
Court of Queen's Bench
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
February 1999**

**Child Custody Case No. 9703-16174
Between:
Duncan P. Dorey and Margaret J. Dorey, Plaintiffs
– and –
Janice L. Steingard, Defendant**

Some background about the Dorey-Steingard child custody case:

A child custody battle began in Family Court that involved a professing woman. The plaintiffs were Duncan and Margaret Dorey, who were father and stepmother to two daughters: Teresa and Katie Dorey who were 8 and 6 years old, respectively, at that time. The Doreys were pursuing sole custody of the two girls.

The Defendant, Janice Steingard, was Duncan Dorey's former common-law spouse, and she was pursuing sole custody of her daughter Katie, and also of Duncan's daughter Teresa. Teresa Dorey's birth mother died when she was 18 months old, and Janice Steingard was a guardian of Teresa Dorey. Janice's father was an Elder with a meeting in his home, her sister Linda Steingard was a Sister Worker, and two of her siblings were also Two by Twos. Duncan had professed at one time, but did no longer and Janice had re-professed.

NOTE: Willis Propp, the Alberta Overseer, was a witness under oath in this case.

The Questions below were asked by attorneys in the court case

The Answers are those given by Willis Propp

• P 3-5

Q Now I would like you to tell me a little bit, if not in extensive detail, but just give a little bit about the doctrine of the religious group of which you are the overseer...Now, the religious group does not have an official name. Is that correct?
A We have no denominational name.

Q And this has existed for how long?

A Well, it came to Alberta in about the year 1907

Q Now, at one time in the Province of Alberta, the religious group had a name, the Alberta Society of Christian Assemblies. Is that correct?

A That was a descriptive name for the government.

Q And who gave it that name?

A The registrar.

Q Okay, And who registered the documents in regards to that matter?

A The legal firm of Field and Field

Q And was it — did you tell the firm of Field and Field to in fact give that name to the religious group?

A No, sir.

Q And why was it — why was it done?

A I applied as simply Christian, and they said it was too vague.

Q Okay. And why did you need any kind of name at all?

A Some governments require that, and we were trying to be a help to our fellow members in Hungary, and they required some form of registration.

Q And does the society still exist?

A No

Q What happened to it?

A It was dissolved. We sought legal counsel and had it dissolved."

• P 29-30

Q: Do you, sir, file income tax forms in Canada?

A: Pardon me?

Q: I'm sorry. Do you file income returns in Canada?

A: We have just started this year to do it. It hasn't been necessary before that. I filed a letter with the — I filed a letter with the Income Tax Department in 1949, that from a certain date in 1948 I began in this full time evangelistic ministry, and I'm only supported by the unsolicited free will offerings, and I have never heard from them since, but now they have required our ministers to file income tax returns for the sake of Alberta Health. It was a policy.

Q: What happens when you receive monies that are more than are necessary for you? You said — you told us they are used. Where are they put, those monies?

A: The money is entrusted to me in the first place, and then I entrust that to faithful elders among us, the local church elders, and they keep it for me, and it's used at my discretion.

• P 86

Q: You have the sole discretion as to how to spend that money, and there is no accountability except to God?

A: As far as I'm concerned. But any interest that is accrued on that money is looked after by the elders that have it. It's held in trust, and it's not in anyone's name but their own, and so they pay the income tax on the interest that is accrued.

• P 97

Q: Your group never meets in formal church buildings; does it?

A: On occasion.

Q: Are you referring to the convention grounds?

A: No. No. But sometimes we have the use of church buildings for preaching the gospel.

• P 106-107

Q: Now, you talked previously when Mr. Schwartz was asking you questions about the hierarchy of the group. Now, if a Worker and a Friend don't agree on an issue, where can the Friend appeal that decision by a Worker to?

A: Would you mind repeating that, again, please?

Q: Okay. There is a disagreement between a Worker and a Friend. The Worker makes his decision on an issue and the Friend doesn't like it?

A: The Friend —

Q: Let's say that the Worker says to the Friend that I don't want you to attend Meeting any more. Now, where would the Worker — or where would the Friend appeal that decision to?

A: I — I haven't any experience of asking a person to stay away from a Meeting.

Q: Okay. But I'm giving you a hypothetical issue, and the question isn't whether or not you know of people who have been told to stay away from Meeting. The issue is if that decision was made, where would the Friend appeal that decision to. Would he come to you?

A: They could come to me. The reason that a person would be asked to stay away from a Meeting, I know of some instances when that has happened, but the reason for it is — well — well advised that it's not proper, and they are only asked to stay away from a Meeting for a time, with a thought of returning.

• P 107-109

Q: When did your group start?

A: In Alberta, it began in 1907.

Q: Before that?

A: I know it came from Ireland before that

Q: Okay. Isn't it, in fact, the case that your group, your denomination was started by William Irvine in Ireland in 1897?

A: That's an untrue statement, sir.

Q: Well when did start it, then?

A: No one could start the Lord's way in the world. People can find the Lord's way in the world, but no one can found it. It was settled in heaven before the world was.

Q: Okay, so you are saying no one can start it, they can only find it?

A: Yeah.

Q: Who found it?

A: Pardon?

Q: Who found it, then?

A: Well, I found it in 1940.

Q: Okay. Who was the first Worker?

A: I wouldn't know that, sir.

Q: Well, the point I'm getting at, Mr. Propp, is people who've researched this group can take it all the way back to in 1897, and then it stops with William Irvine.

A: I see.

Q: Now, do you know of any Workers prior to Mr. Irvine?

A: I don't know, no.

Q: Okay. And, in fact, Mr. Irvine was excommunicated from your group; wasn't he?

A: All I know about that is from what others have told me, and he was once hearty in his fellowship, and for reasons that I am not sure about, he was asked to leave, and it was only after that that he suggested that he had founded the group.

Q: In fact, one of the early Workers, Edward Cooney, he was asked to leave, as well; wasn't he?

A: Exactly.

Q: And the William Irvine, his followers today are commonly called Irvinites or the Message People, as I understand it?

A: And the ones that follow Cooney were called Cooneyites.

• P 114

Q: You are aware of various web sites and chat groups on the Internet about your group?

A: I know about them, but I don't break into them. Some of the other Workers do.

• P 115

Q: Now, if a Friend has done something wrong, my understanding is that they might have Meeting pulled from their house or they might not be allowed to participate in Meeting; is that correct?

A: A meeting pulled from a house is if the Workers aren't welcome in the house.

• P 130

Q: Now, you have already indicated that sermons are not tape recorded, but are notes kept of the Meetings and the sermons?

A: Not all notes — or not all messages are.

Q: Are you aware of any instances where the Workers have directed that notes not be taken?

A: Yes, I believe they would rather not because often people don't get it accurately, and when they do, we ask them to send their copy to us so we can edit it so that a misinterpretation is not given.

Q: So you are indicating that the Workers have sometimes directed people not to take notes at Meeting and Convention because they might not get it right?

A: Well, not to distribute them. They can have them for themselves, but not to distribute them.

• P 135-136

Q: But in your group, can an individual achieve salvation without the assistance of a Worker?

A: I believe they would be brought in touch with the ministry in time.

Q: So that's a no?

A: Yes, it's not — they don't have to hear a Worker. They can hear one of our Friends who would eventually bring them in touch with the ministry. The ministry is a foundation of the church. It's built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ, himself, being the chief cornerstone.

Q: But what I'm talking about, sir, isn't it a belief of your group that in order to achieve salvation, they must achieve it by hearing the gospel from the Workers?

A: Well, it's just a point of doctrine that we are not to talk about, sir

Q: Well, I am not talking about doctrine, sir. I am talking about characteristics of groups; is that one of your beliefs?

[Well, I am not ...]

A: It's part of the doctrine of the church that how can people hear without a preacher and how can they preach except — that's part of the biblical doctrine. I'm sure other churches would be reading that same verse.

Q: Now, would you agree that your group has various rules about conduct and what is expected of people?

A: We don't have rules and regulations, and if they are interpreted as such, we are sorry. We encourage people, as we said. We are not directors of man's conscience, we are just ministers of the word.

• P 137-138

Q: Well, Mr. Propp, you already testified that you are a penniless preacher. Above and beyond what we've talked about today, you don't have any other business interest; do you?

A: I certainly don't. And I would like to just add that I am not a penniless preacher. That's not a terminology among us because we all have money that is given to us. Free will. We are not penniless.

Q: I would assume that when the Workers go out into the field, do they always pay cash or do they use credit cards?

A: Some have credit cards and some pay cash.

Q: And I understand at various times, you had a credit card?

A: I did, sir.

Q: One with a rather high credit limit?

A: Yes, because we dealt with all the travel of our overseas Workers back in — and it was very convenient for that.

Q: I believe the credit limit on your card was \$20,000?

A: It was in excess of 20,000 at one time.

• P 38-46

Q Now, Mr. Propp, before I get into my own questions, I just want to ask you a few questions to clarify a few things that you said this morning to Mr. Schwartz. Now, you indicated to Mr. Schwartz that your group, commonly known as the Two-by-Twos, has never taken a denominational name. Correct?

A We have never taken a denominational name.

Q Okay. Except for the one time you are indicating that you registered in Alberta as the Alberta Society of Christian Assemblies. Right?

A But that was not a denominational name, sir. That was only identification by the government.

Q And what do you define as a denominational name?

A When people use it among themselves as what they belong to.

Q Okay. So let's change the question around a bit here. Except for the society that was registered in Alberta, were there any other names registered in Canada in earlier years?

A We understood during the war years of 1942 to '45 that the identification then was Christian Conventions, representing assemblies of Christians.

Q And have the overseers and workers made use of that name?

A Only officially.

Q Okay. And why is it that you make use of the name Christian Conventions officially but deny ever taking a name?

A Because in other countries where they are registered, it's a different name, and it's never used among us.

Q Okay. Well, what about in Canada?

A The same in Canada. Never used among us as a name that we take as a denominational name.

Q Well —

A It's not registered as a denominational name.

Q Well, you are confusing me a bit here because on one hand you are saying your group never takes a name, but on the other hand you say that they have registered names.

A To identify them—government—like, I'm confusing you, sir, but we confuse everyone in that respect, because we—it's the most difficult thing to explain, because we do not—we do not use it among us at all, and the same within the scripture, there were terminologies that designated what's God's people were, but they were never denominational names.

Q Well, wouldn't it appear to the average person to be rather deceptive for, on one hand, to make use of letterhead that uses a denominational name and on the other hand deny that it exists?

A In the early — in the early letterhead, it even had on it "assuming the name only" because it's not a denominational name.

Q Okay. Now, getting back to the issue of the Alberta Society of Christian Assemblies, my understanding is you're saying this was just a descriptive name.

A Yes.

Q Okay. And you testified this morning that you or the other workers didn't pick that name. It was picked by the Registrar?

A Right.

Q Well, I'm a bit confused on that point, sir, because I have registered societies before. I have registered corporations before, and the Registrar never imposes a name. It's always selected by the individual who registers it.

A As I said, we submitted Christian. We had a frame of reference and handed that to the lawyer, and it was registered as Christian in Hong Kong. It's registered in Christian in some of the other countries, and when they submitted that to the Registrar, he said it was too vague, so he gave that name.

Q So you are indicating that if you requested a document from your lawyer's file, they would have the rejection notice by the Registrar saying: We are not excepting this name. Instead we have imposed this other name?

A I only heard that from the lips of the lawyer that I sought counsel from.

Q But you would be able to obtain that rejection sheet?

A Is that getting into solicitor confidentiality?

Q No, it's not. It's a document from Corporate Registry. So you would be able to produce that letter?

A I would have to try if necessary.

Q Okay. Now, my understanding from your testimony is that you registered this name for a short period of time in order to help workers in Hungary.

A Correct.

Q Okay. And what are the names of those workers?

A Well, the worker from our province Esther Laslo.

Q Okay. And is that the person you are helping?

A She –

Q My understanding it was her companion.

A Her companion Anne Court, and she was from another country. She was from Scotland.

Q Okay. Well, I understand that the Two-by-Twos are registered in the United Kingdom as well under a name. Why did she need to have an overseer in Alberta register a document in Alberta for a worker that doesn't even come from Alberta?

A It was because of the group of workers in Hungary, and they required registration, and they required backing for the registration. That's the only reason we did it, because we didn't need it here. They just required backing from us.

Q And what's the name of this other worker?

A Anne Court.

Q Okay. And you say she's from Scotland?

A Right.

Q And so she would be able to produce documents showing that the Hungarian government requested this?

A I'm sure she could.

Q Okay. And when you were preparing these documents, I would assume that you received some sort of correspondence from Hungary indicating what they needed?

A From our workers — just from our workers.

Q Okay. So you have copies of those letters?

A I have some of those letters.

Q And you would be able to produce them to the Court?

A I could produce them today.

Q Okay. Well, we'll want to look at them before we recess for lunch.

THE COURT: Why? Why, please?

MR. ARENDS: What I'm getting at, sir, is that I'm not interested in getting into a debate about the theology. The issue here, and what I want to get at, is the conduct and credibility of the various parties' witnesses. As I indicated previously when we started the case, the issue of theology, etcetera, etcetera, as far as we are concerned is completely irrelevant. So—and it's no use to this court for me to sit and debate with Mr. Propp as to his interpretation of the Bible. It's not relevant to the issues before the Court. We don't care. However, it is relevant when there are certain characteristics of this group and the deceptive nature of this group in which Mr. Propp will say one thing and wouldn't necessarily have the documents or the evidence to back up that assertion. That goes to the issue of Mr. Propp's credibility. That's what I'm interested in.

THE COURT: Yes, but surely the question of registration of a name for a society is of very little relevance, if any.

MR. ARENDS: And I can advise the Court when I first started—

THE COURT: And how would it ever touch the question of credibility?

MR. ARENDS: What I am getting at here, sir, is that when I first started working on this file, and the issue of the Alberta Society of Christian Assemblies came up, my attitude was: So what? There is a hundred societies registered every day. Big deal. However, for the actual members in this group and the ex members who have been told through countless years: We don't take a name, we have never taken a name, we have never registered with government organizations. We are, you know, a clean, pure church, to put it that way, and then they find out that in fact this document was registered behind their back, without their knowledge, deceptively. Needless to say, there is a lot of upset individuals about what had gone on there and the conduct of Mr. Propp. It doesn't have to do with the issue of registering a society. Big deal. A society is a society, a corporation is a corporation. Mr. Propp could have ten of them. I don't really care. The issue is when the workers go around denying it exists, go around and prepare these documents and register for reasons in reality which are different from what they say, that goes to the issue of conduct.

THE COURT: I haven't had any — I haven't heard any evidence of workers being disaffected by reason of the registration of a name.

MR. ARENDS: I'm not talking about the workers. I'm talking about the way that the members of the group have been deceived as to the true nature of the group by the workers and by Mr. Propp. That is the issue, and it goes to the Issue of credibility. That's what I am getting at.

Now, I realize your point where you say, well, so what? It's just a society. Big deal. However, your position is that we have heard this story before. These Hungarian workers, who amazingly, this is the first time we have actually been able to get an answer as to who these people's names actually are. Yet when you actually look at the documents, you say, well, that doesn't appear, when you look at them, to be the actual reason why this Incorporation occurred, so there was an issue of deception there of the membership, and here you have also an individual who is registering a society in Alberta specifically for a reason so that they can get a visa for an individual who isn't even a Canadian citizen.

THE COURT: He didn't say that. He didn't say that.

MR. ARENDS: Well, that's my understanding of what his evidence was is that he — that the Hungarian government needed proof of registration, proof of a name, proof of whatever in order to keep that individual in Hungary.

THE COURT: Well, I'm not going to ask him to produce all kinds of documents. The point is completely beyond me. I am certainly interested in the allegation that this is an oppressive religion and therefore inimical to the children's best interests. That's all. You have led evidence to that effect. Your friend has pretty well stuck to the allegations in an attempt to refute them through this witness, and I would be obliged if you would continue along the same lines.