

Title: People of the Philippines vs. Jose M. Baes

Facts:

The case began with a complaint filed by Jose M. A. Baes, a Parish Priest of the Roman Catholic Church in Lumban, Laguna. The complaint alleged that Enrique Villaroca, Alejandro Lacbay, and Bernardo del Rosario committed an offense against religion by forcing a funeral procession of an individual belonging to the 'Church of Christ' to pass through the churchyard of the Roman Catholic Church, consequently profaning the place and disregarding the religious feelings of the Catholic parishioners, in violation of Article 133 of the Revised Penal Code.

The accused pleaded not guilty and waived the preliminary investigation in the justice of the peace court. However, the case did not proceed as the fiscal filed a motion for dismissal arguing that the act did not constitute the offence complained of and that at most, the accused could be charged with threats or trespassing. The lower court sustained the motion and dismissed the case, prompting the parish priest to appeal. The plaintiff's appeal was initially denied but later granted due course by virtue of a writ of mandamus from the Supreme Court in G.R. No. 45780.

Issues:

1. Whether the facts alleged in the complaint constitute the offense of offending religious feelings as defined and penalized under Article 133 of the Revised Penal Code.
2. Whether the act of allowing the funeral procession of a non-Catholic through the Catholic churchyard, against the parish priest's objection and with alleged force and threats, is offensive to the religious feelings of Catholics.

Court's Decision:

Upon review, the Supreme Court reversed the lower court's order by dissecting Article 133 of the Revised Penal Code. The Supreme Court affirmed that the complaint indeed constituted an offense against religious feelings provided by law, considering the significance and the religious purpose of the churchyard as part of the place devoted to religious worship. It held that the issue of whether an act is offensive to religious feelings should be considered from the perspective of the faithful of the religion concerned and is a question of fact that must be determined by trial.

Doctrine:

The Supreme Court emphasized the doctrine that acts offensive to religious feelings must be

determined within the context of the religious faithful concerned and the specifics of the place devoted to religious worship. Also, the Supreme Court highlighted that criminal laws, especially those involving potential violations of religious sentiment, are interpreted in the context of the specific tenets and sensitivities of the faith adversely affected.

Class Notes:

- Article 133 of the Revised Penal Code states: Acts offensive to religious feelings shall be punishable when they are committed in a place devoted to religious worship or during the celebration of any religious ceremony.
- An act must be notoriously offensive to the religious feelings of the faithful to constitute a crime under this provision.
- The determination of whether an act is offensive is subjective and should be viewed from the perspective of the followers of the offended religion.

Historical Background:

This case emerged from a cultural and religious context where the Philippines was predominantly Catholic with a history of sensitivity towards issues infringing upon religious sanctity and feelings. The case reflects a period wherein religious sentiment held significant sway in legal matters and highlights the judiciary's endeavor to balance adherence to the law with respect for diverse religious expressions within a multicultural society.