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Robert S. Michaelsen Memorial Lecture at UCSB to Examine Supreme Court Ruling on Bible Reading in Public Schools

UC Berkeley law professor Jesse Choper will give the Robert S. Michaelsen Memorial Lecture at UC Santa Barbara on Wednesday, May 23.

One of the country's leading experts on constitutional law, Choper, the Earl Warren Professor of Public Law at Berkeley Law, will speak on "The Historic Decision of School District of Abington Township v. Schempp: Supreme Court Developments Before and After." His talk will begin at 3 p.m. in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building, at UCSB.

In the 1963 case of Abington Township v. Schempp, the Supreme Court was asked to consider whether state laws requiring public schools to provide time for Bible reading at the beginning of each school day violated the establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment. The court ruled in favor of Edward Schempp and declared sanctioned, organized Bible reading exercises in public schools in the United States to be unconstitutional.

"The Schempp decision had a major impact on the study of religion in the U.S.," said UCSB religious studies professor Richard Hecht, noting that in Justice Tom Clark's

opinion, the court's decision ruling out prayer did not prohibit the teaching about religion. "Prior to the Schempp decision, there were only a few public institutions that offered programs in the study of religion. It was only in private universities where the study of religion flourished, usually alongside schools of theology." The Schempp decision led to the growth of religious studies programs throughout the nation, Hecht noted, so that today, they exist in every major public university.

The Robert S. Michaelsen Memorial Lecture is named for the emeritus professor of religious studies who joined the UCSB faculty in 1965. A distinguished scholar who helped found the religious studies department, Michaelsen also served in a variety of top administrative roles at the university, including terms as Acting Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and as the Vice Chancellor of UCSB. Michaelsen retired from the university in 1989 and died in 2000.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.