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Embattled prof Simmons
takes early retirement

By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The long-running saga of embattled Christian ethics professor Paul Simmons ended Jan. 6 when he unexpectedly announced his decision to take early retirement from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The surprise announcement means the seminary will be spared the ordeal of "heresy hearings" against Simmons, hearings which seminary trustees expected to hold soon in an effort to fire the professor.

The news brought a sigh of relief from trustee leaders, but a faculty spokesman call the episode foreboding.

Simmons, whose ouster has been sought by ultra-conservative trustees for several years, said the final straw in his ordeal with the seminary was "the political nature" of the administration's response to a sexually explicit video he showed in class in December.

Simmons, 56, has been at the center of controversy since 1987, when the Southern Baptist Peace Committee alleged he was too liberal, criticizing his views on abortion and homosexuality. The situation intensified in 1990, when some seminary trustees began clamoring for his dismissal.

But his decision to retire early came amidst a new controversy over his decision to show the video, which is designed for rehabilitation of people who have suffered severe spinal injuries.

Simmons showed the video, "One Day, One Time," Dec. 15 to a master's-level Christian ethics class titled "The Church and Sexuality."

Ironically, Simmons presented the video on the same day Southern's trustees met in Atlanta to consider buying out his contract. By a vote of 21-34, trustees rejected a proposal from their academic personnel committee to pay Simmons \$362,000 -- the equivalent of six years of salary and benefits -- to leave the school where he has taught since 1969.

Consequently, Simmons appeared headed toward a showdown with the trustees who wanted him fired. Sources close to both trustees and seminary

administrators anticipated he would face charges in a series of "heresy hearings," possibly leading to his firing.

Because Simmons was a tenured professor, trustees who wanted to fire him would have had to prove he violated his contract or taught contrary to the school's doctrinal statement.

Simmons circumvented all that with his decision to retire, which was retroactive to Dec. 31. Seminary administrators stressed the decision to retire was Simmons' alone, noting he had not been asked or urged to take that step by the administration.

Both Simmons and seminary president Roy Honeycutt declined to cite the financial terms of Simmons' retirement.

The early-retirement option is available to seminary employees who are age 55 or older and who have worked at the school for 20 or more years.

"The thing that provoked my decision and finalized it in my mind was the political nature of the administrative response" to the video episode, Simmons told Associated Baptist Press. "Taking early retirement is an option I have considered for a couple of years. At some point, I've been aware my tenure would be over. The question was when and how."

Neither Simmons nor seminary President Roy Honeycutt would elaborate on what would have happened had Simmons not retired, although sources said administrators spent the early part of the week trying to figure out what to do.

Gerald Keown, president of the Faculty Association and an Old Testament professor, reported what was widely circulated on campus: that administrators were considering removing Simmons from the classroom but not firing him. "I think it was threatened," Keown said.

That threat, Keown said, does not bode well for the faculty's future in light of Honeycutt's impending retirement and the expected election of his successor in April. "It...sets a very dangerous precedent."

That precedent puts faculty in a precarious situation, he added: "It obviously suggests that on the basis of a student complaint you are subject to being removed from the classroom."

"I still think the primary motivating cause for everything that has happened is pressure from the trustees and those who have been pressuring trustees," Keown added. "It has been very clear that a good number of those trustees, if not a majority, were almost obsessed with doing anything to get rid of Paul Simmons."

Honeycutt stressed the administration kept its response to the video episode -- which was an administrative matter -- separate from pending dismissal proceedings, which would have been primarily a trustee-initiated process. "They were like trains running on separate tracks," he said.

Still, Simmons said he felt isolated by the issue and the larger context of his controversy with trustees. "Had it been another professor, it would have been a totally different response," he explained. "But because I'm in the limelight, I was singled out for special treatment."

Although he had not shown the film before, it had been presented in other seminary seminars, Simmons said. A seminary source said a portion of the video had been shown one time by an off-campus lecturer in a graduate specialist course.

Simmons defended his use of the 15-minute video in his class. The topic, "the ethics of rehabilitative therapy for spinal-cord injured patients," was part of the course syllabus, he said.

The subject was treated in the larger context of sexual ethics, he said, and any students who did not want to view the video were allowed to leave class without penalty. He also invited a neurosurgeon and chaplain to participate in the discussion of the video and the issue of rehabilitative therapy, he said.

In showing the video and inviting the specialists, Simmons said, he tried to illustrate the minister's role and responsibility in rehabilitating and giving hope to such patients.

His presentation of the issue "was carefully and professionally done," he insisted, adding only four students out of 94 in the class officially protested, and the "vast majority of students are outraged" that he got in trouble for showing the video.

President Honeycutt separated the retirement from the contract buyout proposal trustees rejected last month. "We didn't approach this on a buyout basis," he said.

He also said any comparison between the cost of Simmons' retirement and the legal fees that would have been associated with dismissal proceedings would be speculative. "Had matters moved in that direction (dismissal), there would have been significant cost," he said, "not only in terms of dollars but also in the morale on campus and the impact on alumni."

Although the campus community will feel "great disappointment at the loss" of Simmons, the early-retirement option "certainly will not be as devastating as (heresy) hearings and charges," Honeycutt predicted.

In a broader context, David Dockery, dean of the school of theology, said Simmons' departure would create mixed responses within all the seminary's constituencies.

"Dr. Simmons has in many ways been a lightning rod at the seminary," Dockery said. "Those who have supported him will be disheartened at his departure; those who have differed with him will probably be thankful that he's moving on."

Seminary trustee chairman Wayne Allen, a pastor from suburban Memphis, Tenn., praised Simmons' decision to step down.

"I can think of no better resolution," said Allen. "Under seminary policies, he has earned that privilege" of early retirement.

"Dr. Simmons exercised great wisdom in what he did. You can't predict the outcome of any administrative process, but undoubtedly he felt the outcome would not be favorable."

Allen said the resignation allows the seminary to "give our undivided attention" to its most-important issue, election of a new president to succeed Honeycutt.

Honeycutt likewise said the decision is a good one. "It's healthy for Paul that the long period of controversy has come to an end," he said. "I felt good it came to an end at Paul's decision. It should introduce an era of some stability in that arena."

Honeycutt also had kind words for his colleague. "I've had a long friendship with Paul Simmons," he said. "I have, not only as a friend but professionally, appreciated his contributions to this community."

"I'm thankful for Paul's years of faithful service at Southern Seminary," echoed Dockery. "I wish him well in his ministry in the future."

"I'm thankful that a parting of ways was reached in what I believe was best for each side. It's good for Paul and the seminary that we do not have to go through dismissal procedures."

For his part, Simmons defined the ordeal that led to his retirement as "an enormous grief."

"It's a major life change, and to see what's happening to the seminary is an additional part of that grief and anguish. The seminary is so drastically changing from a place committed to open inquiry and theological excellence to a place that caters to the rage and demands of the far right. Excellent students are being deprived of good education because of a lack of academic interest by poorly equipped students who are not dedicated to excellence in ministry."

The reason for that change is because "the politicizing of the

convention by the far right has in recent years taken the shape of politicized education," he charged. "That, of course, involves the overt intrusion of trustees into the academic process and the content of theological education."

That is a part of a larger movement across the Southern Baptist Convention, he added: "Southern Baptists are going through an identity crisis, and that is reshaping the nature of our seminaries so that theological education among Baptists will hardly be recognizable in the future. It will be determined more and more by the imposition of the points of view, rather than open scholarly exploration. That trend is cause for both grief and alarm."

In the early days of retirement, Simmons plans to complete some writing projects, he said, noting he is confident about his future.

"I believe the same God who brought me here will take me somewhere else," he said. "I'm a theologian committed to Baptist perspectives, and I will champion those wherever I go."

Although some at Southern speculated Simmons might be hired to teach at the moderate Baptist Theological at Richmond (Va.), officials at the Richmond seminary told ABP no discussions have been held or are planned with Simmons.

Trustee chairman Allen predicted Simmons' departure would be the end of this phase of Southern's controversy. He said he is not aware of impending action against any other professor.

Keown, the president of the Faculty Association, isn't so confident. "The climate in which we now are makes it virtually impossible for events to be dealt with objectively," he said. "The political climate seems to influence everything that is said and done."

"We have trustees with their own private agendas that have allowed those agendas to distort what ought to be the primary mission of the seminary and in many cases the valued contributions and gifts of persons who have given their lives to this institution."

"I fear this is only the first of what will likely be an ongoing series of such actions."

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-- Contributing to this story was Mark Wingfield

Student complaints about video
climaxed Simmons controversy

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Student complaints about a 15-minute video shown in a seminary class by professor Paul Simmons accomplished what ultra-conservative trustees have tried in vain to do for five years -- get Simmons out of the classroom.

The video, "One Day, One Time," was shown in Simmons' class on "The Church and Sexuality" at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Dec. 15.

Three weeks later, concerns by seminary administrators about the sexually explicit nature of the video became the catalyst for Simmons' decision to quit teaching at Southern, the professor said.

That decision met with the approval of Simmons' trustee critics, who have been seeking a way to dismiss him and even contemplating holding "heresy hearings" against him this spring.

The video was produced to provide encouragement to spinal-injury victims about their continued sexuality. One part of it reportedly shows a married

couple engaged in sexual intercourse. Students who saw the film said it contains full frontal nudity and explicitly depicts the sex act.

However, students interviewed said it was educational in nature and should not be classified as pornographic.

"From all the people I've talked to, nobody felt like it appealed to any prurient interests, that it was anything that could incite lust or anything like that," said Laura Lemley, a master of divinity student from Nashville who was in the class. "It wasn't anything that could be labeled pornography."

Although repeated attempts were made to find and interview students from the class who objected to the film, none could be located. At least four students reportedly filed formal complaints with seminary administrators about the episode, but seminary officials would not release those names.

The video, which Simmons obtained on loan from Frazier Rehabilitation Center in Louisville, was shown as part of the course's study of ministering to people with various sexual difficulties. It was produced by an educational audiovisual company and is used in counseling patients at the rehab center.

Simmons defended his use of the video in that particular class: "The topic (rehabilitation and sexuality of people who have severe spinal injuries) was listed in the course syllabus, in the outline of lectures, and as a topic for research for students. The effort was to deal with the ethics of rehabilitative therapy for spinal-cord injured patients."

Lemley agreed with that assessment: "The video went right along with the syllabus and the text that we were using because the last part of the book...talks about the sexuality of people who are disabled, mentally retarded and aged."

Simmons explained -- and interviews with students in the course confirmed -- that students were not required to view the video. It was shown on the day before the course's final exam, and Simmons told students the day before that they were not required to attend the class session.

Students also said that the day the video was shown Simmons specifically explained what would be shown and invited any who would be offended to leave with no penalty. Two or three students from the group of 94 reportedly left at that time.

About 12-15 other students left during the video, reported Les Fugate, a master of divinity student from Madisonville, Ky.

Fugate was one of the students who attended the session, watched the video and stayed for the discussion afterward.

Simmons invited a chaplain and a neurosurgeon to participate in the discussion session. The chaplain told students he recently had counseled with a patient whose situation was exactly like the couple portrayed in the video.

"I tried to show students that, as professionals, we link up with other professionals to meet needs of people," Simmons noted. "While we (ministers) don't engage in rehabilitation, we know professionals who do, and we give moral support to those who do."

The professor said only a minority of students in the class objected to the video. "The vast majority of students are outraged" that he got in trouble for showing the video, he added.

Even though seminary administrators said they did not ask for Simmons' resignation, Fugate said he thinks the dramatic reaction to Simmons showing the video is unfortunate.

"I feel like a few students have been able to decide a professor's fate," the student said. "I would like to have had some forum in which I could have said something. I'm probably in the middle. I was somewhat embarrassed by it...but it wasn't something that made me sick to my stomach."

Despite the negative consequences, Simmons affirmed his action. "My handling of this issue and the film was carefully and professionally done," he said. "It was politically incorrect, and that's what won the day."

That's what concerns Gerald Keown, president of the Faculty Association.

"I think the climate in which we now are makes it virtually impossible for events to be dealt with objectively," Keown said. "The political climate seems to influence everything that is said and done.

"I fear this is only the first of what will likely be an ongoing series of such actions."

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-- Contributing to this story was Marv Knox

Baptists hear competing views
on respect for human life

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Two viewpoints on the value of human life are competing for the attention of Southern Baptists in January.

Both the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship are distributing materials on life issues. The mailings are timed to coincide with Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, which will be observed in many Southern Baptist churches Jan. 17.

The annual January observance was placed on the Southern Baptist Convention's official calendar in 1986 to call attention to the Jan. 22 anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in Roe vs. Wade, which legalized abortion in America.

While the SBC observance has traditionally focused on arguments against abortion, the Fellowship material takes a decidedly different approach.

Respect for human life, the Fellowship says, should not be limited to abortion but should cover a range of issues including war, capital punishment, hunger, euthanasia, and humane treatment of the poor, sick and elderly.

In addition, the material notes, both pro-choice and pro-life advocates view abortion too narrowly.

"In their zeal to protect the mother's right to choose, some seem complacent about the profound value of human life," writes David Hughes, pastor of First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, N.C. "Others are so committed to the rights of the unborn they can appear insensitive to tragic circumstances that may indicate the need for abortion."

The CLC materials, on the other hand, take the now-traditional approach, focusing almost exclusively on abortion. The mailing, sent to all SBC churches, includes a Bible study that calls abortion "child sacrifice" and an article that discounts common abortion exceptions -- rape, incest and fetal deformity.

Another article argues against euthanasia and assisted suicide. The eight-page brochure also promotes various CLC resources, including a new videotape on the sanctity of human life.

The CLC has been accused of focusing too much of its attention on abortion. But CLC director Richard Land argues the agency's fervent anti-abortion campaign "does not in any way diminish our concern and efforts to address the other moral issues which the Southern Baptist Convention has assigned to the CLC."

In his introduction to the brochure, Land criticizes those who, beginning in 1985, have argued the SBC observance should target "a wide array of 'life' issues."

"Unfortunately, seven years and more than 11 million aborted children

later, a few Southern Baptists are still trying to minimize the attention the abortion issue deserves," he writes.

Cecil Sherman, Fellowship coordinator, said the Fellowship is not trying to rebut the CLC's arguments about abortion but to "broaden the discussion." The respect-for-life project is not intended to divert Southern Baptists from a concern about abortion, he said. "It is to define that issue in ways that I think are biblical and inclusive of all the ways that modern society is hostile to the sacredness of life," he said.

The Fellowship material, sent to selected churches, includes a Bible study on the value of human life -- in which writer Clista Adkins of Greenville, S.C., says Jesus was more concerned with individual people than issues of right and wrong -- and a "10-point ethic on profound respect for human life."

The 10-point statement, written by seminary ethics professor Ray Higgins, argues that the complexity of life issues resists easy answers. While ideally it is never right to take a human life, Higgins writes, "it may sometimes be permissible to take human life because tragic circumstances are unavoidable in a fallen world."

Also included in the eight-page brochure are a sermon outline, children's sermon, seven daily "meditations on life," teaching suggestions and action ideas.

Called "A Guide for Local Churches Paying Profound Respect to Human Life," the brochure was sent to approximately 700 churches that have contributed to the Fellowship, as well as individuals who have participated in its programs.

The materials were produced by two of the Fellowship's ministry groups -- curriculum development and ethics and public policy. Robert Parham, director of the Baptist Center for Ethics, coordinated the project.

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British Baptists affirm Parks,
pledge to cooperate with CBF, FMB

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- British Baptist leaders have affirmed Keith Parks' decision to direct the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's missions program as being "in the best interests of the work of Southern Baptist world mission."

The leaders acknowledged "the visionary leadership" given by Parks, who resigned as president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board at the end of October, citing in part philosophical disagreements with the board's trustees. In November, he accepted the Fellowship's offer to become its missions coordinator, a post he will assume Feb. 1.

In a statement faxed to the Fellowship's Atlanta headquarters prior to Christmas, the British leaders also expressed their intent to work with both the Fellowship and the Foreign Mission Board and their hope that the mission agencies "will cooperate with each other."

Signing the statement were David Coffey, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, most of whose churches are in England; Peter Barber, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Scotland; Peter Dewi Richards, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Wales; and Reg Harvey, general secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, Britain's 200-year-old mission-sending agency.

"We recognize that with his gifts and experience he (Parks) still has an ongoing contribution to make to the cause of world mission and regret that he

did not feel able to continue doing so with the Foreign Mission Board," the statement says.

It continues: "Knowing him to be a man of prudence, wisdom and integrity we cannot but believe that he has accepted his new position with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship because he genuinely believes this to be the will of God for himself and in the best interests of the work of Southern Baptist world mission."

The statement concludes with a pledge to work with both the Fellowship and the FMB and "our hope that during Dr. Parks' term of office in the coming years both of these bodies will cooperate with each other, as with us, and in a spirit of gospel reconciliation."

That commitment will be important in the future as the Fellowship expands its work in Europe, where mission leaders consider it inappropriate to initiate ministry without the cooperation of Baptist unions there.

Last September the European Baptist Federation, comprising 38 national unions on the continent, including those in Britain, adopted a working relationship with both the FMB and the Fellowship. However, the agreement is not binding on individual unions. Assurances such as the one issued by the British leaders solidifies future ties.

Fellowship officials said they are "very grateful" for the unsolicited endorsement from British Baptists, which they said was the first public statement received from Baptist overseas since Parks' acceptance. Other Baptist leaders in Europe have privately expressed approval of Parks' hiring, however, said Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman.

Parks expressed appreciation to the four general secretaries, for whom he said he has "the highest regard and respect as Christian leaders and Baptist leaders and mission leaders."

"My intention is to cooperate with all Baptists who want to cooperate to meet the challenge of reaching the world," he told ABP.

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Christian publishers tailoring
products for changing market

By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A new breed of Christian consumer is stalking the marketplace with money to spend, throwing the religious publishing industry into a midlife crisis.

To remain profitable, publishers have been forced to search their souls as never before, trying to learn the trick of staying competitive as the rules of American Christianity and publishing change before their eyes.

"Publishers are starting to realize they can't just 'preach to the choir' anymore," said David Troutman, religious products and marketing agent for Ingram Book Distributors, a book wholesaler.

"They have to develop market-smart products," Troutman said. "Many people looking for religious books aren't looking for the latest Jimmy Swaggart. They want books that make them comfortable with their own religious questions."

The new consumers are tired of books that preach dogma. They are indifferent to denominational loyalties. They want Bibles they can understand and books that apply to their own hopes and travails.

In short, they seem opposed to everything Christian publishers used to take for granted about their vast, stable base of church customers.

"Doing business as it always was done won't get it anymore," said Jimmy

Draper, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board. "This is an industry in flux. You have to stay on top of trends. You have to meet people's needs."

"Christianity is having a midlife crisis because it doesn't understand the new person in the pew," said Robert Zaloba, marketing vice president of Thomas Nelson Publishers of Nashville, Tenn., which is home to several of the biggest Christian publishing houses.

"As Christianity goes, so goes Christian publishing."

Christian publishing continues to be big business. Nashville's four largest publishers -- three denominational and one private -- accounted for \$388 million of the anticipated \$898 million in national religious publication sales last year.

Nashville claims 3,500 jobs in the Christian publishing industry, providing an annual payroll of \$75 million.

But publishers, particularly denominational houses, are having to work harder.

In the old days, church-owned publishers built empires on captive audiences of growing churches that compliantly bought their own denominational publishers' Sunday school literature, inspirational books, hymnals and Bibles.

Now that loyalty shows signs of slipping.

-- Southern Baptist Sunday school attendance growth hasn't kept pace with church membership. Sunday school literature sales remain the Baptist Sunday School Board's top revenue source, but units sold have made no significant gain in 20 years. The publisher serves most of the 15 million Southern Baptists and a larger evangelical market.

-- For the first time, the United Methodist Publishing House this year will likely sell as much merchandise to non-Methodists as to Methodists. That's a sign of increased diversification in an era when the 9 million-member United Methodist Church has lost membership each year for nearly 30 years. Sunday school literature used to be two-thirds of the publishing house's business. It has fallen to a third.

-- The Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc., the top black denominational publisher, is trying to decide how to draw young people back to Sunday school, a preoccupation of other publishers as well. The traditional attendance ratio -- more children than adults in Sunday School -- is now reversed.

The publisher had revenues of \$6 million last year -- its best year ever, director Cecilia Adkins reported.

Denominational publishers have other pressures to contend with, including competition from for-profit companies such as Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Profit driven and tied to no denomination, Nelson has been free to pursue its own course, pioneering the Christian self-help market and dominating the general market in Bibles.

Nelson's growth has been an industry success story. With its recent purchase of the Christian book-and-music publisher Word, it has positioned itself for steady growth and may eventually surpass the Baptist Sunday School Board to become the world's leading Christian publisher.

Changing technology also has brought more competition.

Desktop publishing has made book production cheaper and quicker, forcing publishers to watch costs and reduce planning time for a book. A decade ago, 12,000 general and religious book titles were published a year. Now it's 70,000, and an estimated 30 percent more publishers are competing for the reader's time.

"Religious publishers are having to make peace with high technology, a highly fragmented society, and a higher level of independent thinking in the churches," said Jim Clark, director of the Protestant Church-owned Publishers

Association.

Publishers have responded to competition and changing markets by streamlining their operations and producing books that rely more on laypeople surveys and other market-research techniques.

In many cases, that has meant publishing "crossover" fare -- Christian-oriented fiction, critical inquiries into faith, self-help books that attract readers in general bookstores, not just Christian ones.

Titles on subjects previously unheard of -- "How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature" and "When Spending Takes the Place of Feeling," both by Nelson -- are becoming routine on bookstore shelves.

Other market responses by denominational houses:

-- The United Methodist Publishing House last year started a new line of books called Dimensions for Living. They are designed to be easy to read, uplifting in content and reasonably priced. Sales last year were 21 percent higher than expected.

To compensate for declines in sales of Sunday school literature, the Methodist house has expanded other strongholds -- reference books, its network of 58 Cokesbury bookstores and a profitable line of merchandise spanning church bulletins to choir robes. The publisher is also pushing a new trend, helping 1,500 churches set up "book tables," small outlets that do a brisk business after worship services.

-- The Baptist Sunday School Board is in the midst of a managerial overhaul after new president Jimmy Draper found the organization too top heavy, inflexible and uncompetitive. About 160 of its 1,900 employees - 1,300 in Nashville -- were retired or laid off in 1992, but Draper said the result will be a more aggressive organization.

The Methodists also trimmed staff, by 55, and now employ 687 locally.

The Baptist Sunday School Board recently hired EDS Consulting Services, the company founded by Ross Perot, to help officers more efficiently organize their business operations and computer systems.

A new book line called LifeWay is launching the Baptist house into the Christian recovery genre.

The industry "is not as predictable as it once was, and that has brought us to ventures that are looking at people's needs and wants imaginatively," said Robert Feaster, president of the United Methodist Publishing House.

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-- Ray Waddle is religion news editor for the Tennessean in Nashville. This article is reprinted with permission.

Question of profit separates
some publishers from others

By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Some Christian publishers labor in the Lord's vineyard primarily out of a sense of mission, but others do it to turn a profit.

And they disagree over which is more Christian.

"Our Scriptural imperative is to be your best; profit shouldn't be the goal," said Charles Wilson, vice president for trade and retail at the Baptist Sunday School Board, publisher for Southern Baptists.

Mounting competition and consumer unpredictability have forced religious publishing houses to reappraise the ways they reach book-buyers, define their

identities and make profits.

For-profit publishers water down the gospel message in the rush to give people only what they want, the criticism goes.

"We won't soften the Christian message in order to sell books," Wilson said.

At Thomas Nelson Publishers, the world's largest for-profit Christian publisher, executives argue that the profit motive helps the cause of Christ by forcing them to produce books and Bibles that people really want to read.

"If we were non-profit, I don't think we'd be as concerned about the product," said Frank Couch, Nelson's vice president for Bibles. "Being profit-oriented forces us to be needs-oriented."

The rap against church-owned publishers is they tend to be complacent and bureaucratic. Until now, their ready-made church audiences allowed them largely to ignore the broader Christian market.

For instance, while many denominations were still reluctant even to admit that alcohol addiction was a problem in their ranks, Nelson produced "The Serenity Bible," tailored for people in 12-step addiction-recovery programs. It has sold 600,000 copies since 1990.

"If there's a market for it, Nelson will do it," said Steve Papuchis, manager of The Covenant Christian bookstore.

"With other publishers, there can be a reluctance to try something new since it may look questionable to the church membership."

Meanwhile, three years later, the Baptist Sunday School Board has decided to tap into the Christian addiction-recovery market with a book line of its own. One title released last fall was "Making Peace With Your Past" by Texas pastor Tim Sledge.

Couch said Nelson can put more money into research for a Bible or book -- and produce it faster -- than anyone. Nelson put down \$72 million in cash last fall to buy Word, the Texas-based Christian book-and-music giant.

Nelson officers can hatch a new idea for a Bible, arrange an OK from president Sam Moore and line up research money in two days, while it would normally take a denominational publisher months, Couch said.

But Nelson's employees still insist that aggressive marketing and profit sharing run side by side another preoccupation: They believe they are working for the good of Christ.

"I'm delighted to make money for our shareholders while doing something worthwhile of everlasting value," said Robert Zaloba, Nelson's vice president for marketing.

"We're trying to reach the masses," said Sam Moore. "They need that inspiration too. If you don't create what the market needs, you won't succeed."

Moore, a Lebanese immigrant and Southern Baptist, started out in the business years ago, selling Bibles door-to-door as a college student.

Purchasing Nelson in 1969, Moore would later initiate a new easier-to-read Bible translation after his 10-year-old son complained that his dad could produce a million Bibles, but not one he could understand.

Non-profit denominational publishers say they are not indifferent to competition and revenues, but profit isn't everything.

A for-profit company "neglects a number of areas that meet church needs," said Robert Feaster, president of the United Methodist Publishing House.

Academic books for seminaries and ministers, including a new collection of works by Methodism's founder, John Wesley, are examples of important work the Methodist house is doing that won't necessarily turn a buck.

"If we don't do it, no one will," Feaster said.

The Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc. uses its extra revenues to fund a massive correspondence course for

nearly 125,000 Sunday school lay leaders, director Cecelia Adkins said.

The Baptist Sunday School Board finances several of its own training programs and contributed \$3 million last year to other Southern Baptist causes.

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-- Ray Waddle is religion news editor for the Tennessean in Nashville. This article is reprinted with permission.

Boomers returning to church,
but not committed, study finds

By Mark Wingfield

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. (ABP) -- Baby boomers may be returning to church, but only a minority have become loyal, committed churchgoers, according to the author of a new study on baby boomers' spirituality.

Wade Clark Roof, professor of religion and society at the University of California at Santa Barbara, is author of a forthcoming book, "A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation."

With a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Roof surveyed boomers in four states about their moral attitudes, family life and religious and spiritual lives. He summarized his findings in the December 1992 issue of American Demographics magazine.

Despite public perceptions that boomers are returning to America's churches in record numbers, Roof's statistics paint a less flattering picture. He found that only one third of boomers who dropped out of church have returned to some kind of religious activities.

"Some of the boomers who rejected conventional religion when they came of age have returned to the fold," he wrote. "But the real news is that most of them have not come back. They remain a 'lost generation' to churches, still searching for a meaningful spiritual life."

Conservative Protestant boomers were the least likely to drop out of church, however, and are the most likely to return if they did drop out, Roof noted.

For his report, Roof divides boomers -- Americans born between 1946 and 1964 -- into three religious subcultures: loyalists, returnees and dropouts.

Loyalists were social conservatives in the 1960s, had better relations with their parents growing up, and never identified with the counterculture of the 1960s and '70s.

Returnees are middle-of-the-road types, Roof explained, who are "neither rigid traditionalists nor ranting radicals."

Dropouts were likely to have demonstrated, used drugs, joined the sexual revolution and dodged the draft in the '60s and '70s. "Religious institutions, like other institutions, seemed to the dropout boomers to be out of touch with modern values and lifestyles," Roof said.

Boomers from these subcultures tend to relate to contemporary religion in different ways, he noted.

Loyalists still are more loyal to religious institutions. But returnees may return to church without being loyal.

"Only religious loyalists are likely to engage in traditional religious activities such as daily prayers, saying grace at meals or reading the Bible," Roof reported.

A majority of dropouts and returnees believe people should "explore many different religious traditions" rather than settle on just one, he found.

"Returnees feel free to pick and choose from a variety of religious

traditions," he wrote. "They often fashion a set of beliefs and practices that is meaningful to them but does not conform to any religious authority. And although few dropouts are atheists, they look even further afield than returnees for meaningful religious belief."

One thing that transcends the three groups of boomers is a disdain for the term "religious," Roof found. Instead, they want to be known as "spiritual."

Other findings Roof reported in the American Demographics article include:

-- 96 percent of boomers say they were raised in a religious tradition.

-- 58 percent of boomers with religious backgrounds dropped out for at least two years during adolescence or young adulthood. The drop-out rate was highest among Jews (84 percent) and lowest among conservative Protestants (54 percent).

-- Boomers who are returning to religion today are likely to be in their 40s and have school-age children.

-- Childless, married boomers are the group least likely to attend church.

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Richmond seminary receives record gifts in December

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond received record gifts totaling more than \$280,000 in December, including its largest single gift ever.

The record individual gift of 130 acres of waterfront property with an appraised value of more than \$130,000 was given by Richmond businessman Paul Pusey Jr., and his wife, Nell, longtime members of First Baptist Church of Richmond.

Nell Pusey, a former member of the Richmond city council and an active civic leader, is a trustee of the Richmond seminary, which was formed two years ago by Southern Baptist moderates.

December also brought a \$25,000 gift from Dorothy Peace of Greenville, S.C.. Peace earlier gave the school its second largest individual gift -- \$50,000 in 1991. She is a member of First Baptist Church in Greenville.

Another \$25,000 gift came in December from Chevis and Helen Horne of Martinsville, Va. Horne is retired pastor of First Baptist Church of Martinsville and was a visiting professor of preaching at the seminary in 1991-92.

More individuals gave to the seminary in December than in any previous month.

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-- By Beth McMahon

EDITOR'S NOTE: There was no ABP issue for Jan. 5.

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