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Broadman withdraws book over alleged doctrinal concerns

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- In an unusual move, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board has withdrawn plans to publish a book, alleging unspecified doctrinal problems.

The book on hermeneutics -- or principles of biblical interpretation -- was written by Charles Scalise, a former faculty member at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., who now teaches at a branch of Fuller Theological Seminary in Seattle, Wash.

The book had been scheduled for release and featured in the 1995 academic catalogue of Broadman and Holman, the arm of the Nashville, Tenn.-based Sunday School Board that publishes books, Bibles and reference materials.

Scalise said he signed a contract to write the book in 1992 and turned in the completed manuscript last July. In November, Scalise received a letter informing him the publisher had changed its mind about releasing the book "basically for unspecified denominational doctrinal parameters," he said.

"By breaking its contract to publish this book, Broadman and Holman publishers has demonstrated that it is an untrustworthy partner in the ministry of serious evangelical Christian publishing," said Scalise in a prepared statement.

John Landers, editor of academic books for the Sunday School Board, disputed that the publisher broke the contract. "I would say we withdrew from the contract because we didn't have an acceptable manuscript," he said.

Landers said after reading the full manuscript, "I simply concluded it was not in the parameters of the 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" a statement approved by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 which the Sunday

School Board uses as its doctrinal guide.

Asked how the book violates the Baptist Faith and Message, Landers responded it was "more the tone of the book than any particular sentence, I think."

Scalise defended the book, titled "Hermeneutics and Theology: A Scriptural Approach," as "an attempt from a committed conservative evangelical perspective to offer an introduction to hermeneutics and theology to Baptists and other evangelical Christians."

"You can read a good description of it in the catalogue," he said.

The Broadman catalogue, in a full-page listing, describes the book as exploring the relationship between Scripture and theology.

"Before the Enlightenment, Christian disagreements on this question were tempered by a core of agreement on foundational issues regarding the historical accuracy of Scripture," it says. "With the advent of modernity, however, even those foundational issues came into dispute as Christians began to question traditional definitions of history and debate the relationship between history and theology."

"In this volume, Charles Scalise introduces the hermeneutical problem that has divided Christians for two centuries and presents a canonical way for thinking Christians to reflect on the doctrine of God."

The book is described in the catalogue as being "designed as a textbook for college and seminary courses" but "written in an understandable style that also makes it an excellent resource for lay study groups and self-guided personal study."

Landers admitted the catalogue endorsement is ironic. "Unfortunately this was not able to be fished out before that catalogue went to press," he said.

Word of the decision to withdraw the book created something of a stir at a recent professional meeting that Landers attended, he said. Rumors stated that the Sunday School Board is tightening its restrictions on writers and bowing to conservative political pressure in editing decisions.

"I think our doctrinal statement is the same it's always been, which is the 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" Landers responded.

"I heard rumors that pressures were brought to me by certain people, but that's not true," he said. "I also hear people in Louisville were bringing pressure on me. Not true."

Before this fall, both Scalise and his wife, Pamela, were on faculty at Southern Seminary in Louisville. He was assistant professor of church history and associate editor of the faculty journal, "Review and Expositor," and she was associate professor of Old Testament. Both accepted teaching positions at Fuller Seminary after he was reportedly passed over for tenure in Louisville.

Landers said it is unusual for Broadman to reject books for doctrinal reasons. "This is the only case I've ever had of anything like this," he said.

Landers also said he expects Scalise will find another publisher for the book. "He's basically satisfied with what he's written, which is understandable," Landers said. "I didn't feel like this was in the boundaries of what we're publishing."

The book discusses canonical hermeneutics in popular terms, Scalise said. A technical version of the study was published previously by Mercer University Press.

**Annuity Board might offer mutual funds,
but not without approval of SBC leaders**

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Annuity Board voted Dec. 5 to continue with plans to shift its current investment program to mutual funds, but they agreed not to make the change without approval from the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

In a special meeting of Annuity Board trustees Dec. 5 at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, trustees approved resolutions that ensure the Executive Committee will be involved in the process. The resolutions were drafted jointly by leaders of the Annuity Board and the Executive Committee during a private meeting Nov. 29 in Nashville, Tenn.

The board's 73,000 annuitants would notice little change under a mutual-fund structure, which likely wouldn't be implemented until at least 1996. Earnings probably would remain the same, predicted Thomas Miller, senior vice president for public relations. But annuity participants would be able to choose from a variety of funds in which to invest, instead of the four church-pension funds currently offered, he said.

According to federal law, each mutual fund would have to be administered by a separate board of directors, Miller said. That potential change -- the creation of multiple boards under the Annuity Board umbrella -- attracted the attention of the Executive Committee, which is responsible for coordinating the assignments of the SBC's agencies.

The Dallas-based Annuity Board has almost \$4 billion in assets and pays about \$120 million in retirement and relief benefits each year.

Mutual funds have been under consideration by the Annuity Board since 1992. The December trustee meeting was necessary because the process of establishing mutual funds is too complicated for trustees to consider during their regular meetings, explained board chairman Richard Scott of Waco, Texas.

Mutual funds would be subject to regulation under both the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and securities laws of 50 states, Scott explained. Trustees spent most of their December meeting reviewing those regulations and the details of establishing the funds.

Miller said the regulations governing registered mutual funds are more clear and specific than those governing the church pension funds currently offered by the board. Each mutual fund requires the board to issue a prospectus, for instance. "It gives you a more formal relationship with your investors," he said.

The Annuity Board has been under pressure recently to screen its investments more carefully to eliminate those that might be morally offensive to some Baptists, such as investments in companies that provide or support abortion. Some critics have called for the board to establish so-called "sin-free" funds that would avoid a wide range of offensive industries and activities.

Such practices are hard to enact with only four investment funds, board sources say. But establishing a variety of mutual funds would allow the Annuity Board to provide such customized approaches if it chooses. However, some fear having separate boards for each fund would dilute SBC control over the investments.

Under the resolutions approved Dec. 5, the Annuity Board cannot establish mutual funds without approval by the Executive Committee and perhaps, at the committee's discretion, approval by the annual Southern Baptist Convention.

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-- By Greg Warner

Baptist Center for Ethics adds communications post

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Directors of the Baptist Center for Ethics elected Becky Bridges as the

agency's communications coordinator during a Nov. 29 meeting by telephone conference call.

Bridges' responsibilities include marketing resources and events, managing the design and production of resources and editing "Ethics Report," the bi-monthly newsletter for the independent Baptist ethics agency based in Nashville, Tenn.

Bridges, 28, worked from 1992 to 1994 as director of communications and public relations coordinator for the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland. A graduate of Baylor University, she also worked as assistant director of admissions at Dallas Baptist University.

Robert Parham, executive director of the ethics agency, said Bridges "has the marketing savvy and computer skills to produce and to promote BCE's ethics resources to congregations nationwide."

Bridges was elected to a new position. A third staff position, in ethics education, is currently vacant, but Parham said it will be evaluated and restructured before it is filled.

In other business, the directors adopted a 1995 budget of \$229,000, a 30 percent increase over a 1994 revenue of \$163,000. Revenue is anticipated in the form of gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, individuals, churches, conference registrations, resource sales and corporate gifts and grants.

David Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn., was re-elected chair, while John Dunaway, pastor of First Baptist Church of Corbin, Ky., was chosen as vice chair.

Four directors were elected to three-year terms: David Crocker of Fayetteville, N.C.; Ray Higgins of Little Rock, Ark.; Ed Hogan of Crockett, Texas, and Bill Wilson of Waynesboro, Va.

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Supreme Court declines challenge to use of Halloween symbols

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court refused Dec. 5 to hear a Florida man's claim that his sons' elementary school violated the First Amendment by using religiously offensive symbols to celebrate Halloween.

Robert Guyer objected to the depiction of witches, cauldrons and brooms, as well as to teachers dressing up as witches as part of Halloween festivities at Alachua County's Hidden Valley Elementary School. Guyer kept his children out of school on Halloween and later filed suit seeking an injunction to bar future use of the Halloween symbols offensive to his religion.

Guyer's lawsuit claimed the symbols are connected to Wicca, a variety of witchcraft and a religion.

A trial court granted the Alachua County School Board's motion to dismiss the lawsuit, and a Florida appeals court upheld dismissal.

"Even assuming the symbols do have religious significance to some," the appeals court said, the Halloween celebrations do not violate the church-state separation required by the First Amendment.

The Halloween practice clearly serves a secular purpose and does not foster excessive entanglement between government and religion, the appeals court said, leaving only the question of whether the activities endorse or promote religion.

The appeals court said they did not.

"By its participation in these Halloween festivities, the school board does not 'send an unmistakable message that it supports and promotes' Wiccan beliefs," the appeals court said.

The Florida Supreme Court declined to hear Guyer's appeal and stated it would not entertain a motion for rehearing.

As is customary, the nation's high court offered no comment in refusing to review the case.

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-- By Larry Chesser

African-American denominations give \$112,000 in Rwanda aid

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Three African-American Baptist denominations gave a combined \$112,000 for relief work in Rwanda, and pledged another \$50,000, in a presentation Nov. 30 at the Baptist World Alliance headquarters in Washington.

Leaders representing the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc.; the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention U.S.A. and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., presented contributions to Baptist World Aid, the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance.

African American Baptists had already given more than \$90,000 dollars for Rwandan relief through other agencies, the leaders noted.

"We have been touched by the plight of our Rwandan brothers and sisters," said Norman Smith, chairman of the Executive Board of the 650,000-member Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention. Smith presented a check to Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance and Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World Aid.

Charles Walker, chairman of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention Inc., presented a check of \$50,000 on behalf of the NBC. "Since 1882, the NBC has historically and traditionally shown its support for Africa," said Walker.

"We want to bridge the gap between hurting people and a healing savior," said Ronald Hill, director of the Baptist Global Mission Bureau of the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc., who presented a check for \$10,000.

"We are delighted to see the tremendous contribution of African American Baptists," said Lotz. "When tragedy strikes, we all belong together," he added.

Eleazar Ziherambere, formerly a Rwandan Baptist official and now a refugee in Kenya, praised the African American leaders for their gifts in a faxed message.

"While the Western media has showed how Western people are helping, it failed to show what Zairians, Burundese and Tanzanians have done," Ziherambere said. "We heard so much of what Americans did, especially Caucasian Americans, but we never heard about what African-Americans did. I will be a faithful interpreter of your love to our people in tragedy."

Combined, the three African-American Baptist groups have memberships totaling 10 million. All are member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance, the global organization of Baptists with more than 39 million baptized believers and a community of 100 million worshippers.

To date, BWAid has received approximately \$750,000 for Rwandan relief.

"Your contributions will be marked in a special way by your brothers and sisters in Rwanda," said Montacute.

-- By Wendy Ryan and Bob Allen

American Baptists to honor Ken Sehested for peace work

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- Ken Sehested, executive director of the Memphis, Tenn.-based Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, will be honored for his work at next summer's biennial meeting of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Sehested will receive the Edwin T. Dahlberg Peace Award, presented by the ABC's General Board to recognize American Baptists who have "worked constructively for peace with justice and freedom."

Past winners of the award include Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Carter and William Sloane Coffin.

Sehested, 43, is founding executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship, a 10-year-old network linking Baptists involved in justice and peace issues throughout North America. Its board of directors is composed of members affiliated with 12 Baptist conventions and five racial/ethnic groups in the U.S., Canada, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Previously, Sehested worked six years as co-editor and director of education for Seeds, a magazine and educational organization for world hunger issues.

Daniel Buttry, director of the American Baptist Churches' Peace Program, said Sehested, "wages peace with a passion that comes out of a deep love for God, Christ and the people of this world."

The Edwin Dahlberg award honors the former president of both the American Baptist Churches and the National Council of Churches noted for his advocacy of peace.

The ABC's biennial meeting is scheduled June 20-23, 1995, in Syracuse, N.Y.

-- By Paula Womack and Bob Allen

Suit against Texas Baptist church may hinge on bankruptcy-tithing ruling

By Ken Camp

BAYTOWN, Texas (ABP) -- News last September that the U.S. Justice Department had reversed itself, no longer siding with creditors in a bankruptcy-related tithing case against a church, was of more than passing interest to members of one Baptist congregation in Baytown, Texas. It was a ray of hope.

In June, Cedar Bayou Baptist Church was sued by a Houston construction company to recover tithes given by a member who had declared bankruptcy.

The church member was one of three men who had set up an air conditioning service department for the construction company in the mid-1970s. In 1990, nearly five years after the trio had left the company, their former employer filed suit contending that the construction company had overpaid them \$20,000 each. An additional \$30,000 was added to the suit for equipment purchased through the company.

After a jury ruled in favor of the construction company, one of the men -- a longtime member of Cedar Bayou Baptist Church -- declared bankruptcy. Although the construction company initially contested discharge of the bankruptcy, the parties directly involved eventually reached a settlement and the bankruptcy was concluded.

But this summer, the construction company filed suit against Cedar Bayou Baptist Church. The suit declared that the former company employee had given more than \$30,000 to the church between July 1, 1986, and Oct. 14, 1992 "without receiving a reasonably equivalent value in exchange for the transfer."

Although a motion to dismiss the suit filed by Cedar Bayou was granted on procedural grounds, the church feared the plaintiff would try to correct those errors in a refiled lawsuit.

But actions by President Clinton on Sept. 15 "took the steam out of the opposing attorney," said Richard Steel, pastor of the church. In a Minnesota case, Clinton stopped a Justice Department lawyer from arguing in federal court that creditors have the right to seize money given to a church by someone headed for bankruptcy.

The case involved a couple who had given \$13,450 to Crystal Evangelical Free Church in New Hope, Minn., in the year before they declared bankruptcy. The couple's creditors had tried to obtain from the church their donations under a legal provision that prohibits people who are going bankrupt from hiding their assets.

The Justice Department in March had filed a brief supporting the creditors. But shortly before an attorney from the department was scheduled to make his argument to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis, Clinton ordered Attorney General Janet Reno to reverse direction.

When the case proceeded, the bankruptcy trustee argued alone against the church. The case has not yet been decided.

The case is seen as a major test of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, signed by Clinton in 1993. The act was designed to protect religious liberty by requiring the government to show "compelling interest" before interfering in religious practices.

Friend-of-the-court briefs siding with Crystal Evangelical Free Church were filed by a number of religious groups including the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Forcing a church to relinquish tithes given in good faith amounts to an attempt to "undo an act of worship" that is protected by the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, said Melissa Rogers, associate general counsel with the Baptist Joint Committee.

"These are acts of worship, not simply financial transactions," Rogers said.

A ruling against Crystal could open churches to lawsuits by creditors seeking the forfeiture of tithe money, according to Michael Whitehead, CLC general counsel.

"Budgeting by churches becomes nearly impossible if creditors can raid today's offering plate for bad debts of a church member years ago," Whitehead said.

Steel wrote a letter to Clinton about his church's case, and Whitehead mentioned it to Joel Klein, White House counsel.

"The President is aware that Crystal creates risks for many churches like Cedar Bayou," Whitehead said. He noted that the CLC is urging the Justice Department to re-enter a bankruptcy-related tithing case, this time arguing on the side of the church and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act rather than just withdrawing.

Both the Clinton administration and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, a lead co-sponsor of RFRA, have indicated that if the court rules against Crystal Evangelical Free Church, legislation will be introduced to revise the bankruptcy laws to shield tithes given in good faith.

In the weeks since the Justice Department's about-face, Cedar Bayou Church has been "in a holding pattern," Steel said.

"We've just been waiting to see what they (the Houston construction firm and its lawyers) would do next," he said.

The church initially was told by its attorneys that they "had won a skirmish, but not the war." But Steel noted that the plaintiffs have appeared less eager to pursue the suit after the Justice Department reversal in the Crystal Evangelical Free Church case.

Unlike the Minnesota case in which creditors were trying to seize tithes given in the year prior to the filing of bankruptcy, the Houston construction company was attempting to gain \$30,000 plus interest in tithes given over more than six years.

"If there ever was a frivolous lawsuit, it would seem to be this one. It was just dumb," Steel said. His church is considering whether to take action to try reclaiming its own legal expenses, but he doubts they will file suit.

However, if the construction company renews its efforts to seize tithes given to the church, Cedar Bayou is ready to fight. In a statement issued by the church earlier during the dispute, members emphasized that the real issue is religious liberty, not bankruptcy.

"If a court can declare that a church member does not receive any 'reasonable equivalent value' for his gifts to his church, the court is defining how one can practice his religious faith and oversteps its dominion in the realm of that relationship between church and state," the statement read.

"We cannot capitulate; we must not surrender to the state our freedom to practice our religion and support it with our tithes."

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Texas state paper editor announces retirement plans

DALLAS (ABP) -- Presnall Wood will retire as editor of the Baptist Standard at the end of 1995, he announced to the newspaper's board of directors Dec. 2.

Wood, editor of the Texas Baptist newspaper since 1977, will be 63 when he steps down.

"At the close of 1995 I will be only 16 months away from age 65, which the policy manual of the Standard says is the age of normal retirement," Wood said. "For many years I have felt age 63 should be the time for my retirement. It is transition time in Baptist life, and it is time for transition at the Baptist Standard."

Wood said he has received "nothing but full support" from the paper's directors, who asked him to reconsider his decision and continue as editor. He said he and his wife, Joyce, "believe it to be the will of God" that he prepare to retire now.

The director of the Standard's board, Bill Brian of Amarillo, said he will appoint a search committee before the end of 1994 to seek Wood's replacement. The committee will begin the search in early 1995, he said.

Brian said the directors accepted the retirement notice "with deep regret."

The Standard joins a list of papers seeking new editors. Editor searches are now underway in Alabama, Florida and Maryland/Delaware. Several editors in other states are nearing retirement.

With 250,000 subscribers, the Standard is the widest-read of the 39 Baptist papers owned by state and regional conventions affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Like most of the papers, its influence has been eroded over the last decade by declining circulation. In 1980, the Standard reported a circulation exceeding 392,000.

The paper was founded in 1888. It is the 10th oldest of the Baptist state papers.

Wood said he plans to remain in Dallas. "Retirement will afford additional time for family, personal interests and other ministries," he said. "Texas Baptists have been kind through the years to give me opportunities to supply preach and speak on special church occasions such as anniversaries and dedications. If such opportunities are

presented in the future, they will be prayerfully considered."

Prior to becoming editor in July 1977, Wood was pastor of Park Place Baptist Church in Houston. He was a member of the board of directors of the Standard when he was elected editor, succeeding John J. Hurt, who had been editor from 1966 to 1977. Wood's 17-year tenure is the longest of any Standard editor. The previous longest tenure was by F.M. McConnell who was editor from 1928 to 1944.

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-- By Toby Druin and Bob Allen

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