

Associated Baptist Press

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Author withdraws Ephesians commentary; claims project tainted by politics

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- A seminary professor has resigned his contract to write for the New American Commentary series, claiming politics has overtaken scholarship in production of the series.

Carey Newman, assistant professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., was to write on Ephesians for the series, published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

He is the second writer to back out of the series in as many months. Stephen Wyrick, a religion professor at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Texas, withdrew from the Joshua commentary in January, citing disputes with Sunday School Board editors over biblical dating.

The New American Commentary series was launched in 1987 to present an inerrantist view of Scripture. To date, 15 of the 42 planned volumes have been published. Newman's volume on Ephesians was to have been published next year.

Newman notified the publisher of his withdrawal Feb. 10. Although he did not release his letter to commentary editors publicly, Newman explained the reasons for his decision in an interview.

The commentary series has become "caught in the undertow of the larger Southern Baptist Convention context," he said.

"As I understood it when I agreed to be a contributor, the series intended to be a rallying point for evangelical scholarship among Baptists, something of a catalyst to get us beyond the ever-growing impasse in the SBC," he said. "I now fear the original intention of the series has changed."

Sunday School Board officials rebutted Newman's claims that the series has changed.

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"We cannot control perception, but the reality is that the purpose of the New American Commentary has not changed," said Charles Wilson, Sunday School Board vice president for trade publishing.

Sunday School Board President Jimmy Draper said Newman's concerns "though not founded on fact are real to him, and we must accept his decision. We will continue to work within the guidelines we all accepted for the New American Commentary, and I am confident God will bless our efforts."

Newman said his action should not be construed as withdrawal from the SBC or from conservative biblical scholarship.

"My commitment to the accuracy, the integrity, the truthfulness and reliability of holy Scripture has not changed. The Bible is as faithful as God is -- no more and no less," he said. "What has changed is the ever-growing politicizing of the series."

Writing for the commentary series is now perceived both inside and outside the SBC as submission to a particular political agenda within biblical conservatism, Newman suggested.

"Being a part of the series speaks volumes on where one stands within the SBC. And thus, as a matter of conscience, I felt I must resign," he said.

Newman, 35, admitted resigning such a plum assignment could damage his career and label him among some of his peers. But he asserted he doesn't belong to "any political party" and is not "a lieutenant for anybody."

Rather, he finds himself in the "conflicted experience" of being neither a moderate nor political conservative in the SBC, he said.

David Dockery, Newman's dean at Southern Seminary and associate general editor of the commentary series, said he was saddened by Newman's withdrawal. Dockery previously served as general editor of the series and recruited Newman for the assignment before either of them had moved to Southern Seminary.

Dockery said he admires Newman's abilities, scholarship and evangelical commitment to Scripture. But he disagrees with Newman that anything has changed about the series.

"I am convinced that the original vision, goals, purposes and editorial policies that have existed for the project since its inception are still in place," Dockery said. "I have the highest support for and confidence in the editorial leadership of Ray Clendenen."

Clendenen, the new general editor of the series, has been the target of previous criticisms. Robert Sloan of Baylor University resigned his role as a consulting editor of the series in 1992 to protest Clendenen's election, calling it a "partisan choice."

Clendenen declined to comment on Newman's resignation, deferring to the statement issued by Wilson, his supervisor.

Dockery said he had read part of Newman's initial work on the Ephesians commentary and was pleased with what he saw.

"This really caught me off-guard," Dockery said. "He did what he thought he had to do. I'll continue to support him as dean as his friend. Newman admitted in an interview that writing on Ephesians could have created tension between him and Southern Seminary's president, Albert Mohler. But that was not a direct cause of his withdrawal, he said.

Ephesians contains key passages related to the doctrines of election and predestination, lynchpins in a theological system known as Calvinism which Mohler embraces.

"Calvinism has become an issue of great debate at Southern Seminary," Newman said. "That the president embraces five-point Calvinism is a matter of public record.

"Although we never have held a formal conversation on the matter, my only informal discussion with him of my views on Ephesians 1:4-5 made it clear the position I was going to take in the commentary was irreconcilable with his position.

"So while it is not accurate to say that the issue of Calvinism led me to this decision, it is true this decision was made in this larger context," Newman said.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says: "Just as (God) chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should

be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

Another writer for the Ephesians commentary will be selected by the series' panel of New Testament editors: Dockery; Richard Mellick of Criswell College; Curtis Vaughan of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Paige Patterson of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Religious broadcasters shaping grassroots public opinion

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Ask people on the street to name a religious broadcaster and they're likely to say Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart or Oral Roberts.

But walk through the halls of the National Religious Broadcasters convention, and you're not likely to bump into any of those top-dollar televangelists. They're all members, and they may be in attendance. But at this convention, the superstars in the secular market are overshadowed by thousands of other religious broadcasters who not only appeal to the grassroots; they are the grassroots.

While the secular marketplace has focused on the trials and tribulations of a few flamboyant televangelists, a broader movement has been sweeping the nation nearly unnoticed. Hundreds of small Christian radio and television stations have cropped up from Miami to Anchorage -- and they're drawing an intensely loyal following.

"Christian" radio today is the third most-common radio format in the United States, according to Mark Ward Sr., editor of the 1995 Directory of Religious Media. One of every seven radio stations in America today has a "religious" or "gospel" format, he reported.

The directory lists 1,328 radio stations with a Christian format. These stations are served by more than 200 national and regional producers of Christian radio programming.

"Christian" television also has thrived, with 163 stations reported last year. And the future of Christian influence through television looks even brighter as cable television systems expand to offer hundreds of channels rather than dozens, said Jack Johnson, president of the Southern Baptist Radio & Television Commission. "They will be desperately looking for quality programs."

This is a different day from just over 10 years ago, when Southern Baptists launched the ACTS satellite network, Johnson explained. "We did the network because we had to have a way to get programming on."

But today, more communications channels are available than are quality programs to fill them, he said.

Much of the religious programming broadcast on radio and television today is music and preaching. But a growing portion of it is talk-show and information-sharing.

One hundred seventeen of the Christian radio stations listed in this year's Directory of Religious Media carry a "news/talk" format. And most stations with other formats offer a variety of news and talk segments produced locally or syndicated nationally.

While these stations draw their content from a variety of sources, they share a common theme of commitment to conservative religious teachings and conservative political positions.

"The influence of Christian broadcasting is much stronger than most anybody would believe," Johnson said. "The recent reshuffling politically certainly had some influence by religious radio."

Some in Washington got an early warning of this mounting influence one year ago, when the House of Representatives was considering legislation that would have restricted home schoolers. Home schooling is a hot

button for conservative Christians who make up a major portion of Christian radio's audience. So radio programs nationwide sounded the alarm, and concerned listeners started calling their congressmen.

An estimated 1 million calls jammed the Capitol switchboard. As a result, the threatening legislation died.

That incident "awakened some people to the influence of Christian radio," said Tom Strode, communications director for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's Washington office.

Strode said he believes Christian radio has caused more Christians to get involved in the political process. "Because of what they've heard on Christian radio, Christians have learned they need to become involved," he explained.

Strode said the CLC also realizes Christian radio provides an excellent outlet for their message. "If one of our people gets on Marlin Maddoux's 'Point of View' ... we know we're reaching a lot of Southern Baptists we wouldn't otherwise reach," he said. "In some cases, we reach a higher percentage of Southern Baptists than we reach through our normal means."

Maddoux is becoming one of the most powerful influences on Christian talk-radio. He began "Point of View," his own talk show in 1975 and it now is a cornerstone of the USA Radio Network, which he founded in 1985.

Maddoux claims "Point of View" is "the world's largest live radio ministry." The USA network now has more than 1,200 affiliates which carry some combination of the network's offerings, including "Point of View" and USA Radio News, a 24-hour national news service reporting from a conservative standpoint.

Other major suppliers in the Christian talk-radio format include Focus on the Family Satellite Network and Salem Radio Network.

"Focus on the Family," the flagship program of the network by the same name, is the top-syndicated daily radio program in the U.S. religious market. It airs on more than 1,400 stations nationwide. Focus on the Family's lineup also includes a Spanish-language program and a brief commentary on current events called "Family News in Focus."

Salem Radio Network offers a variety of talk shows and commentaries, including a weekly program by conservative newspaper columnist Cal Thomas, a favorite of the Religious Right.

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'Not a matter of left or right, but right or wrong,' Rogers tells broadcasters

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE (ABP) -- Drawing an illustration from his experience in the Southern Baptist Convention's 15-year internal struggle, Adrian Rogers urged the nation's religious broadcasters Feb. 11 never to sacrifice truth on the altar of unity.

The religious spectrum today is "not a matter of right or left," Rogers said, but "a matter of right or wrong."

"It is better to stand alone with the truth than to stand with the multitude for a lie," Rogers told the opening session of the National Religious Broadcasters convention at Nashville's Opryland Hotel.

Southern Baptists know Rogers as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., and a three-time SBC president. But NRB members know him as host of the "Love Worth Finding" preaching program, which airs daily on 75 radio and television stations.

Most religion today is "get-alongism," Rogers said, warning that he fears movement toward a world church.

"Sometimes denominations have to stand alone," he added, citing the battle for control of the SBC since 1979. Rogers has been a key player among conservatives who have wrested leadership from moderates in a 15-year campaign for theological purity.

Some within the SBC's moderate wing have noted all Southern Baptists -- conservatives and moderates alike -- would fall to the right of most religious bodies, Rogers said. The implication is that those Rogers and other conservatives would brand "liberal" aren't really liberal at all when viewed as part of the whole religious community.

"So what?" he retorted, saying there is no comfort in how one's position compares with the rest of the world. A person's theological understanding is either right or wrong, he said.

Rogers based his message on the biblical account from I Kings 22, in which the prophet Micaiah stands against the bad advice of 400 other prophets who said only what the king wanted to hear.

As with Micaiah, the message God gives a person to speak may not be pleasing or prudent, but it must be spoken, Rogers said.

He cited five points about telling God's truth. First, "It is better to be divided by truth than united in error," he declared.

"Not only is Jesus Christ the great unifier; Jesus Christ is the greatest divider ever to hit the earth."

Second, "It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals than falsehood that comforts and then kills," Rogers said.

He lashed out at "user-friendly" churches, saying, "It is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God." The church's job is not to make the gospel palatable, but profitable, he asserted.

Third, "It is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie," Rogers said.

Fourth, "It is better to stand alone with the truth than to stand with the multitude for a lie."

In addition to his comments on the SBC, Rogers at this point used Noah as an illustration. By today's standards, Noah would be considered a bigot and a fundamentalist, Rogers said. But Noah "went into the ark a minority (and) came out a majority," Rogers declared to thunderous applause.

Fifth, "It is better to ultimately succeed with the truth than to temporarily succeed with a lie," Rogers said.

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Ralph Reed urges Christians to read "Contract with America"

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Every Christian in America should buy and read the book form of the Republican "Contract with America," according to Ralph Reed, president of the Christian Coalition.

Reed stopped by the annual convention of the National Religious Broadcasters Feb. 13 to pitch the book, which already is No. 3 on the New York Times best-seller list.

"Pro-family" Christians who criticize Speaker Newt Gingrich and the House Republicans for being more interested in fiscal reform than family values haven't read the fine print in the "Contract," Reed said.

"There's a lot of misinformation out there," he asserted. "This is not exclusively a fiscal document."

But even the proposals for fiscal reforms should be supported by Christians because they are "pro-family" issues, Reed said.

The Christian Coalition, an offshoot of televangelist Pat Robertson's media and political interests, has pledged to spend \$1 million to promote the House Republican agenda outlined in the "Contract."

Reed said his organization is "not a Republican Party organization" but he believes the "Contract with America" outlines a family-friendly agenda Christians should support. The Christian Coalition's goal is "not to legislate family values ... but to ensure that Washington values families," he said. Reed suggested Congress should be required to develop a "family impact statement" for all proposed legislation. In Reed's perspective, family-friendly public policy would remove government entirely from doling out charity and leave that work to noble citizens and churches.

"I'm for charity," he said. "I just don't think government ought to give out charity."

He cited the biblical story of the Good Samaritan, who found a traveler beaten and robbed and then helped him out of his own resources. "The Good Samaritan story doesn't say 'Verily, verily, send 40 percent of your money to the government,'" Reed noted.

The issue of family values will be a key factor in the 1996 presidential race, Reed said. He predicted a Republican candidate will latch onto this theme and carry it to victory because "it's a winning formula."

Any candidate who combines the traditional fiscal conservatism of the Republican Party with "pro-family" issues and the "Ross Perot issues" of a balanced-budget amendment and term-limits automatically will win a majority of the vote, Reed said.

But he declined to predict who that candidate will be. He called former Education Secretary Lamar Alexander "very viable" and praised the influence of former Vice President Dan Quayle, who recently announced he would not seek the presidency in 1996.

Reed also downplayed the possibility of a split in the Republican party between fiscal conservatives and religious conservatives.

The rural South, once strongly Democratic, has left its political roots, he said. The so-called "Reagan Democrats" have turned into "religious Republicans," he said.

"Whoever gets their hands on the ball of family values ... will get the Republican nomination and ... win the election," Reed predicted.

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Religious broadcasters shun Clinton over views on abortion & homosexuality

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Bill Clinton wasn't invited to the National Religious Broadcasters convention again this year, but convention-goers could pick up free copies of "The Clinton Chronicles Book" in the exhibit hall after Sunday morning worship.

"The Clinton Chronicles Book" is the written form of the controversial video series promoted by televangelist Jerry Falwell. The book and videos attempt to link Clinton to a bizarre history of criminal and sexual acts, including murder-for-hire, money laundering and numerous extra-marital affairs.

Clinton has dismissed the accusations as outlandish, as have numerous others both inside and outside the White House. Evangelical author Tony Campolo recently challenged Falwell to grant him equal air time to rebut the charges against Clinton, which have been given prominent play on Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour."

Although the NRB enjoyed cozy relationships with Republican presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, the NRB and Clinton have been at odds from the start.

Reagan accepted invitations to address the NRB five times in his eight years as president, and Bush spoke to the group three times in his four years as president. Both men were invited to the NRB every year of their presidencies.

The religious broadcasters invited Clinton, a Southern Baptist, to speak to their annual gathering in 1993, his first year as president. But the invitation came too late, or Clinton didn't see the need to accommodate the NRB, depending on who tells the story.

The next year, Clinton wasn't invited at all. And this year, the president was purposely left off the invitation list a second time.

NRB leadership issued a three-paragraph statement explaining why Clinton was not asked to this year's convention, despite a longstanding tradition of inviting the sitting president.

"During a White House briefing with Baptist leaders and religion journalists in October, President Bill Clinton again reiterated his position on the issues of abortion and homosexuality by claiming the Bible is 'ambiguous' about them. Statements such as these reaffirm our decision to withhold an invitation to address our convention from the president," NRB leaders said.

"We cannot give a platform to a leader who so aggressively supports and puts forth policies and positions which are blatantly contrary to Scriptural views," the NRB statement said.

The NRB also found itself at odds with another Southern Baptist president, Jimmy Carter, according to "Air of Salvation," a new history of religious broadcasting written by Mark Ward Sr.

Although many religious broadcasters supported Carter at first and were thrilled with his open testimony of faith in Jesus Christ, they ultimately disowned him, Ward reports.

This event was the turning point in transforming religious broadcasters from merely preachers into dispensers of conservative-oriented news, Ward suggests. He quotes Ben Armstrong, longtime NRB executive director, as saying religious broadcasters in 1976 discovered they had "a new commission to reclaim our nation for God and to rescue it from the erosion of secular humanism."

By 1980, when Carter was seeking re-election, religious broadcasters faced a decision, Ward writes: "What was most important in a political leader? His personal faith? Or his public actions? In President Carter they had a sincere brother of like faith, one who faithfully upheld his commitment in private but whose public leadership allowed the liberal agenda to prosper."

Ultimately, the religious broadcasters declared Carter to have "faith without works," Ward reports. That same year, candidate Reagan spoke to religious broadcasters and other evangelicals at the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas.

"Now, I know this is a non-partisan gathering, and so I know you can't endorse me," Reagan said in that now-famous speech. "But I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing."

Despite the NRB's unofficial alliance with conservative politics, prominent political figures of any stripe were not to be found at this year's annual convention at Opryland Hotel in Nashville. Clinton wasn't there, but neither were any of the newly empowered Republican leaders from Washington or any presidential candidates for 1996.

But politics wasn't far from the minds of many NRB members apparently. A Sunday afternoon book-signing by the author of "The Clinton Chronicles Book" drew a large crowd.

Eager readers formed a line half the length of the massive exhibit hall to get the free, autographed copies.

13th annual prayer breakfast prays for peace of Jerusalem

NASHVILLE (ABP) -- Honoring Holocaust survivors was the theme of the 13th annual "International Christian Prayer Breakfast to Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem" organized by Southern Baptist layman Ed McAteer.

Several thousand people paid \$25 apiece to attend the three-hour event, held Feb. 13 at Nashville's Opryland Hotel in conjunction with the National Religious Broadcasters convention.

The crowd included both Christians and Jews, many from the Nashville area. McAteer, from Memphis, Tenn., has been a prominent political and religious strategist for conservative causes. He is founder of the Religious Roundtable, which sponsors the prayer breakfast.

Southern Baptists were prominent among the event's participants. Adrian Rogers, former Southern Baptist Convention president and pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, delivered the invocation. Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, led the pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

Speakers at the prayer breakfast included Elwood McQuaid, president of Friends of Israel; Joe Rogers, former U.S. ambassador to France; Sam Moore, chairman of Thomas Nelson Publishing Co.; Uzi Baram, Israeli tourism minister; Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to the United States; Yehuda Levy, publisher of the Jerusalem Post; and Kaare Kristiansen, a prominent politician in Norway who resigned from the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in protest of giving the award to Yassar Arafat.

John Hagee, a television preacher from San Antonio, Texas, led the assembled body in a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem.

A statement in the printed program explained that those in attendance represent "the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians in the United States" who agree that a strong Israel is important to U.S. strength. "We believe there is an iron-clad bond between the State of Israel and the United States," the statement said.

"Bible-believing Christians consider the support of Israel a biblical mandate," it continued. "We believe one of the reasons America has been blessed over the years is because we have stood with Israel."

The statement further said the nation of Israel is "a manifestation of what America was and is."

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