

Book cancellation shows Baylor troubles not over

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By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

WACO—Baylor University reversed plans to publish a book about its recent history—a work critics called a defense of the school's previous administration and defenders called a valuable interpretive analysis of issues facing Christian higher education.

The announcement came one week after former Baylor President [Herb Reynolds](#) sent a sharply critical e-mail to the volume's editors, but university officials insisted their concerns predated that decision by at least five months.

	
Schmeltekopf	Hankins

The volume’s editors—former Baylor Provost Don Schmeltekopf and Barry Hankins, a professor of church-state studies and history—learned in mid-November the university would not publish [*Baylor Beyond the Crossroads: An Interpretive History, 1985-2005*](#).

In May, Baylor University Press had dropped its plans to publish the book after the usual academic peer-review process, Schmeltekopf acknowledged.

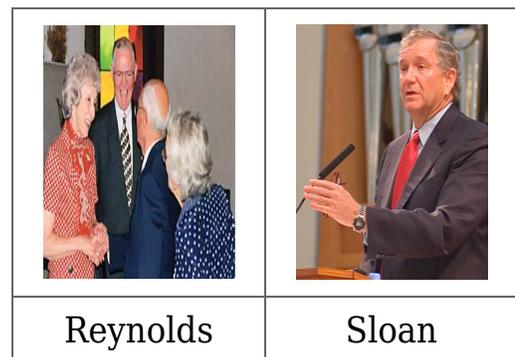
“We asked to see the reviewers’ comments but were denied the request,” he said.

After the academic publishing house rejected the manuscript, the editors appealed to Provost Randall O’Brien, asking that the book be published under the university’s imprint, and he authorized it.

But in June, O’Brien told the book’s editors they needed to work with the school’s general counsel on the project.

“Upon reflection, the provost recognized there were policy issues and legal issues associated with the use of the university’s name that needed to be worked out,” said John Barry, Baylor’s vice president for marketing and communication.

At least one contributing author asked for his manuscript to be returned after Baylor University Press rejected the book. Some sources said two writers pulled out of the project.



On Nov. 15, O'Brien contacted Schmeltekopf and Hankins to inform them the book would not be published under Baylor University's name.

Since the book did not contain papers delivered at a university-sponsored event—and since it had been rejected by Baylor University Press after failing to pass muster with peer review—the school did not want it to “go out with the Baylor brand,” Barry said.

“I'm very disappointed in the decision not to publish” the book,” said former Baylor President Robert Sloan, who wrote one chapter. “The decision to publish was made when I was president, and the commitment to publish was renewed by the next administration.”

Sloan served as Baylor's president from 1995 to 2005—a period marked both by significant expansion and bitter polarization within the university's varied constituencies. [He resigned](#) after the Baylor Faculty Senate twice gave him “no-confidence” votes, and the regents voted three times on his continued employment. Sloan said.

“I would never want to ban books or suppress dissenting views. That's not good Baptist practice, and it's not the way higher education works,” said Sloan, who was inaugurated Nov. 29 as [president of Houston Baptist University](#).

Baylor's decision not to publish the book was announced one week after the editors received an e-mail from Reynolds—who served as Baylor's president from 1981 to 1995 and as chancellor from 1995 to 2000—claiming their book was inaccurate and threatening to release damaging information about Sloan.

In the e-mail, quoted extensively in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Reynolds wrote: “My tertiary specialty in the Air Force was psychological warfare, and I was no mean student thereof. It is imperative to know everything conceivably possible about your adversaries and their soft

underbelly—and have the patience to await the most strategic moment to strike.”

Reynolds particularly took issue with a chapter in the book written by Sloan, writing to the editors: “... I will be releasing one or more documents which I have kept in my ‘asbestos’ files. Readers will quickly see an unvarnished picture of this ‘Intentional Christian.’ You and he, and most certainly others, have opened the door with both your publicly touted ‘Intentional Christianity’ and ad hominem. I have placed strategic items in the hands of a trusted confidante who will release them timewise as I have instructed him, so they are now out of my hands.”

Reynolds explained in an interview he used such strong language in his message to Schmeltekopf and Hankins because he “wanted to put them on notice and have them stew about it a bit.”

“I used the term ‘adversaries’ because I felt the project itself was an adversarial and gratuitous endeavor that they initiated,” he added.

Schmeltekopf noted he and Hankins were “both shocked and puzzled, to say the least,” by the e-mail from Reynolds.

“The truth is that Herbert Reynolds is the hero in at least two chapters (“The Charter Change” and “Baylor and the Big XII Conference”) and is throughout treated with respect. Actually, Robert Sloan comes under more criticism than Herbert Reynolds,” said Schmeltekopf, who served as Baylor’s provost under both Reynolds and Sloan.

Both Sloan and Reynolds were invited to submit chapters for the book, he noted. Sloan accepted, and Reynolds declined.

“People generally are under the mistaken impression that the book is essentially an apology, in the sense of a defense, for [Baylor 2012](#),” the university’s long-range plan launched during the Sloan administration,

Schmeltekopf added.

“That is not the case, although three or four chapters (out of 11) related to Baylor 2012, directly or indirectly. The book is essentially the story—‘interpretive history,’ we call it—of the major developments at Baylor from 1985 to 2005. Our goal was to provide a higher level of understanding of what has transpired during these stormy years.”

Sloan agreed the book served an important purpose—not only in recording Baylor’s recent history, but also in “providing a context for the discussion” about the integration of faith and learning.

“Good faith disagreements are healthy. This kind of discussion should go on without fear of coercion or pressure to suppress it,” Sloan said.

But Reynolds saw the book essentially as a “gratuitous” defense of the Sloan administration and its implementation of the Baylor 2012 vision.

“The motivations and preoccupations of several of the authors of this extensive apologia are blatantly transparent,” he said, characterizing the interpretive history as a “rush to judgment, ” a “historical embarrassment” and a “self-serving” document.

In particular, the book advanced the agenda of a segment of the Baylor faculty and administration who championed an approach to university education that smacked of creedalism, Reynolds said.

The book “is an attempt to interpret or reinterpret two decades of Baylor’s history with the hopes of salvaging and justifying the concerted efforts of a very few individuals who, over the past decade, attempted to introduce heterodoxies into the Baylor University community—and the Baptist centrality thereof,” he said.

Schmeltekopf confirmed he and Hankins are seeking another publisher.

“The main revision will be to begin the book with the charter change (in 1990) rather than the Baylor situation in the 1980s,” he said. “We may add a couple of chapters, as well, covering aspects presently not dealt with directly.”

Reynolds expressed regret that the editors planned to pursue other avenues to get their work published.

“Perhaps the worst outcome of this entire gratuitous endeavor will be to revive and enlarge the contentiousness of the past several years both on campus and among the larger Baylor constituency,” he said.

“Its publication may well undermine the current administration’s efforts to take a new road to reconciliation and progress in the years ahead—efforts that could move Baylor beyond the lingering rancor of the recent past.”

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