

# Concerns voiced about new LifeWay curriculum

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CLEVELAND, Ga.—A Southern Baptist college president says new curriculum by LifeWay Christian Resources is biased toward a theological viewpoint not “representative of the vast majority of Southern Baptists.”

Emir Caner, president of Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Ga., wrote on the blog SBC Today that he and other conservatives were initially encouraged when the Southern Baptist Convention publishing house announced The Gospel Project, a new flagship curriculum line designed to go deeper than old Southern Baptist literature he described as “shallower than an oasis in the midst of the Mohave Desert.”

After previewing early sample lessons, however, Caner said concerns arose that the authors and sources cited tilted decidedly toward a Calvinist or Reformed theology that emphasizes predestination and diminishes the importance of free will.

In addition, Caner noted a bent toward “ecumenism,” which he defined as “a liberal theological movement that emphasizes unity between denominations over theological distinction (and) replaces any emphasis upon Southern Baptist theology.”

“We are most definitely at a crossroads with our own publishing house,” Caner said. “Will the future of LifeWay be one that represents and advocates Baptist theology or is The Gospel Project the beginning of an ecumenical paradigm shift?”

Caner said those questions are larger than the content of two sample lessons in newly minted material.

“They speak to the heart of the debate in Southern Baptist life,” he said. “We are in the midst of an identity crisis. And we are a divided people whether we wish for it to be so or not.”

A recent survey by LifeWay Research found more than 60 percent of Southern Baptist pastors are somewhat or strongly concerned about the effect of Calvinism on the denomination.”

“With that being the case, leaders must deal with such concerns and, unless they wish for division, alleviate such fears,” Caner said. “To publish and promote a new curriculum that has such strong Calvinistic leanings only intensifies the situation and disregards the voice in the pew. The vast majority of Southern Baptists do not want to be known as Calvinists or Arminians, but as Baptists with a rich heritage they can learn from.”

LifeWay describes The Gospel Project as “a Christ-centered curriculum looking at the grand narrative of Scripture and how the gospel transforms lives.”

Thousands of churches have participated in a pilot project by downloading four free lessons of the study, managing editor Trevin Wax said in a news release.

“The launch of The Gospel Project is just weeks away, and we are so encouraged by the initial response,” Wax said. “Thousands of churches from a variety of denominations and affiliations have ordered the curriculum, and it is selling nearly twice what we originally forecast.”

The press release said LifeWay is stepping up plans for a second printing of the curriculum to keep up with the demand.

Originally started by pastors concerned about divisions in Southern Baptist life, SBC Today was acquired in July by Truett-McConnell and Caner was named as publisher.

On Aug. 1 the blog carried a story about a pastor in Maryland who after reviewing The Gospel Project carefully decided it wasn't right for his church.

"There are numerous subtle seeds of the Calvinistic approach to Scripture and many that are overtly obvious," observed Ralph Green, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Bel Air, Md. "The more we read and studied the curriculum, the more convinced we have become that this curriculum is not suitable for use here at Calvary."

"I am greatly disappointed because there is nothing wrong with healthy dialogue and wrestling with theological issues," Green said. "But when a curriculum is designed to teach only one side of the issue, it is no longer a healthy debate but indoctrination; and we cannot allow that indoctrination to take place here at Calvary."