

Editorial: Do we really want an impartial media?

November 7, 2018

My experience as a pastor and now as a budding steward of the Baptist Standard Publishing Company tells me we do not want an impartial media—or pastorate. We may like the idea of an impartial media, but our behavior says otherwise.

Sean Hannity's appearance with President Trump on Monday provides a clear case study.

The media in the spotlight

"In spite of reports, I will be doing a live show from Cape Girardeau and interviewing President Trump before the rally. To be clear, I will not be on stage campaigning with the President. I am covering final rally for my show. Something I have done in every election in the past." Sean Hannity [tweeted](#) this clarification at 8:02 a.m. on Nov. 5.

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— Sean Hannity (@seanhannity) [November 5, 2018](#)

"Sean Hannity, come on up, Sean Hannity," [Trump said](#) later that evening on the rally stage.

And he did. Hannity took the stage and the mic, and the first words he spoke were, “By the way, all those people in the back are fake news.” Among those people in the back was at least one of Hannity’s colleagues at Fox News, who he later tweeted were not intended to be included in his blanket statement.

Hannity went on to say, “ ... the one thing that has made and defined your presidency more than anything else—Promises Made, Promises Kept.” He followed with a short list of talking points in praise of Trump’s record on the economy and dealings with Iran.

[Hannity said](#) then and later he had no idea Trump was going to invite him on stage.

The response to Hannity’s appearance and words was swift and blistering. All the usual suspects decried the situation and what it indicated about the blurring of lines between the media and politicians. Even Fox News tweeted its [disapproval](#).

“Fox News does not condone any talent participating in campaign events. We have an extraordinary team of journalists helming our coverage tonight and we are extremely proud of their work. This was an unfortunate distraction and has been addressed.” <https://t.co/BgkGgEEg2p>

— Kristin Fisher (@KristinFisher) [November 6, 2018](#)

Regardless what anyone in the media—including myself—may say about Hannity’s appearance on stage with and praise of Trump, the crowd at the Show Me Center in Cape Girardeau, Mo., seemed very pleased. I doubt they were alone in their enthusiasm.

To Hannity’s credit, his listeners do not have to wonder what he thinks and

which politicians he supports. He has been clear for decades, and his incredible popularity demonstrates just how many people like his brand of impartiality.

Few criticize Hannity's impartiality but rather how he employs it. Even his harshest critics are willing to allow Hannity to be stridently conservative—so long as he doesn't actually stump for Trump, which he said he wouldn't, said he hadn't planned to do, and then seemed to do anyway.

Let's bring this closer to home. If we weren't talking about the likes of Hannity, if instead we were talking about Eric Black and the *Baptist Standard*—your local media—I wonder how I would be received stumping for the current—or any—president of the BGCT. Would you have any sense that this media outlet was less than an impartial voice?

The media and itching ears

At my most cynical, I believe people do not want an impartial voice but want a voice affirming what they already think and believe.

I rarely see or hear people criticize statements with which they agree. I do see and hear people cite “itching ears” in response to statements with which they disagree. “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:3).

Those making the “itching ears” accusation intend to say those with whom they disagree are the ones who have turned their ears away from the truth (2 Timothy 4:4) and toward what will make them feel good about themselves and the world. Those making the “itching ears” accusation also communicate—intentionally or otherwise—that they are the faithful ones

who haven't abandoned the truth.

The truth is we all have itching ears. We all want our thoughts and beliefs affirmed. None of us wants to be questioned or criticized. Indeed, we want a partial voice to affirm us with no counterbalancing voice to condemn us. We want the media—and our pastors—to shed light on the wrongdoing of others, to speak up and to speak out against those wrongs, and to point to what is right.

But how often do we know the difference between what is right and what we want to be right?

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