

American Baptist Leader Disputes Dobson's Depiction

American Baptists' top leader has accused religious broadcaster James Dobson of misrepresenting the denomination by fostering "untrue, broadly brushed stereotypes" that American Baptists are strongly pro-homosexual.

In an article opposing gay marriage in the [September issue](#) of "Family News From Dr. James Dobson," the Focus on the Family founder described a "virtual avalanche of gay and lesbian advances that have descended on us."

"On the liberal end of the religious spectrum, the battle is about lost," Dobson wrote. "The United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Church, Reform Judaism and the Unitarian Universalists permit the ordination of gay clergy and bless same-sex unions in some form."

In a letter to Dobson dated Oct. 16, Roy Medley, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., said Dobson's depiction "misrepresented" the American Baptist denomination.

"You imply that gay ordination and the blessing of same-sex unions is pervasive throughout the 5,700 local churches and the regional and national organizations that constitute this denomination," Medley wrote. "This is far from an accurate picture of American Baptist life."

While American Baptist churches are autonomous and free to act on matters of conscience, Medley said, the "large majority" of congregations would not view the blessing of same-sex unions or the ordination of gays as being supported by Scripture.

The denomination's General Board has spoken twice on the issue. A 1992 resolution termed homosexual practice "incompatible with Christian teaching."

About the same time the General Board issued a statement calling for dialogue on issues of human sexuality, acknowledging a wide spectrum of understandings on the topic.

“This is perfectly consistent with four centuries of Baptist thought and practice, where dialogue and respectful disagreement have brought clarity to issues and affirm the Baptist distinctives of ‘soul liberty’ and the sanctity of the individual conscience,” Medley wrote.

Medley said he had been contacted by a number of American Baptists who support Dobson but were disappointed by his depiction of their denomination.

“I am disappointed that you did not take the time and effort to genuinely understand who American Baptists are before you so readily characterized 5,700 autonomous but interdependent congregations,” Medley said.

“I trust you will receive these comments in the spirit in which they are offered and that in the future you will not be so quick to foster untrue, broadly brushed stereotypes of American Baptists,” Medley’s letter concluded.

The reference to American Baptists in Dobson’s column includes a footnote to its source, an Aug. 10 *Orlando Sentinel* story.

The story, “Gay Dispute Rocks Faithful Institutions; Religious Groups Nationwide are Tackling Tough Questions,” described ongoing debate in several church bodies over homosexuality.

“On the more liberal end of the spectrum there is less debate,” the *Sentinel* story observed at one point. “The United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Church, Reform Judaism and the Unitarian Universalists permit ordination of gay clergy and bless same-sex unions in some form.”

Brenda Moulton, national coordinator of the 50-church Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, said Medley is correct in his view that the majority of American Baptist churches aren’t pro-gay.

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“I frequently find myself explaining how it is possible for a *Baptist* to be welcoming and affirming of gay and lesbian people, so it a bit of a change for American Baptists to be characterized as a denomination that affirms gay ordination and same-sex unions,” she said. “While I pray for the day when this might be true for the denomination that I love, Dr. Medley is correct in informing Dr. Dobson that the majority of American Baptist churches would not take that position. ”

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