

Matthew Vines' 'God and the Gay Christian' Brings Sharp Division Among Christian Media

WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group has resigned from the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) following a dispute over the publication of Matthew Vines' *God and the Gay Christian*.

Though Vines' book is not targeted for the CBA market and is published not by WaterBrook Press or Multnomah Books, but by an affiliated imprint under Penguin Random House's Crown Publishing Group division, they share many of the same staff members.

NRB President and CEO Jerry A. Johnson wrote a letter to board members explaining the situation.

"Unfortunately, while the Multnomah Publishing Group is separate from Convergent, as a legal and business entity, the staff of the Multnomah and Convergent operations are substantially the same," he stated in the letter. "Most notably, Steven W. Cobb serves as the chief publishing executive for both groups. ... Other Christian workers do so as well. ... This issue comes down to NRB members producing unbiblical material, regardless of the label under which they do it."

"I asked them to reconsider and end the practice of having Christian workers from their publishing house work on Convergent projects," Johnson's letter continued. "They declined to do so at this time and asked how we would respond. I told them that if they wanted to remain NRB associate members, I would have to refer the matter to our Ethics Committee for review, or they could agree to resign their

membership. They agreed to resign immediately.”

God and the Gay Christian, which argues that homosexuality is not sinful, has received much derision from the Christian publishing community, particularly in light of its close ties with WaterBrook Multnomah, which publishes books for the evangelical market. Cognizant of the title’s controversial nature, Cobb took steps to ensure that staff who were uncomfortable with the project weren’t forced to work on it.

“We actually went to great lengths and have always gone to lengths here to make sure that our people here have never been required to work on anything that offended their personal beliefs,” Cobb told *Christian Retailing* when Vines’ book was released. “We met with everyone in small groups and, in some cases, individually, and I can think of a couple of employees off the top of my head that asked to not participate in the publishing function regarding this particular book, and we were respectful and grateful for their candor and excused them from any involvement, so we don’t run that kind of shop here.”

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler, editor of the e-book *God and the Gay Christian?: A Response to Matthew Vines*, worries that Convergent’s self-described focus on “publishing books for progressive and mainline Christians who demand an open, inclusive and culturally engaged exploration of faith” could damage WaterBrook Multnomah’s standing in the evangelical community.

“I believe that Multnomah is in serious danger of crashing its brand in terms of evangelical trust,” Mohler said in an interview with *Christianity Today*. “I am quite certain that a host of evangelical authors share this deep concern.”