

Presbyterian theologian stumps the Carolinas for justice

Self-identified evangelical says Jesus and the Bible don't condemn gays and lesbians

by David Gillespie . Q-Notes staff

Jack B. Rogers is Professor of Theology Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary. From 1990 to 1999, he served as vice-president of that institution. In this positions, Rogers had tremendous influence on the thinking of numerous Presbyterian ministers throughout the United States. Rogers was also Professor of Philosophical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary from 1971 to 1988 and, prior to that, Professor of Philosophy at Westminster College in Pennsylvania from 1963 until 1971.

He also served as moderator of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for 2001-02, an office that, while only a year in duration, wields significant influence over the life of the denomination.

Recently, Rogers, a self-identified evangeli-

cal, detonated a bomb within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and larger evangelical Christian circles with the publication of his book, "Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church."

Rogers' book is much more than a rehash of old arguments that have come down from scholars like the late John Boswell and the more popular, recent work of Daniel Helminiak in his



Dr. Jack B. Rogers has multiple speaking engagements across the Carolinas in September and October.

"What the Bible Really Teaches About Homosexuality." The real importance of this book is found in the fact that Rogers is a self-identified evangelical Christian who has arrived at a pro-gay position after much biblical and theological reflection.

Disavowing any personal motive for adopting this position, Rogers derives his conclusion from history as much as from theology. In a chapter aptly titled "A Pattern of Misusing the Bible to Justify Oppression," he examines how the church

in the United States has handled two issues in the past — slavery and women — and finds a

close parallel in its treatment of gay men and women.

In sketching how Christendom in general, and the Presbyterian Church in particular, misused the Bible to justify its oppressive attitudes toward women and blacks in the second half of the 19th century and well into the 20th, Rogers assigns much of the blame to a wrong-headed theology based on Scottish Common Sense philosophy. He also blames, among others, Saint Augustine, who provided an argument for slavery in "The City of God."

Rogers offers fascinating insight into the thinking of two leading U.S. theologians of the late 1800s, James H. Thornwell and Robert L. Dabney, on the theology of slavery and race. He turns to Princeton Seminary Professor Charles Hodge for an analysis of how the American church justified its oppression of women.

How could such learned men get it so wrong? To answer this question, he points to their dependence on Common Sense doctrines as developed and expounded by Thomas Reid in the late 1700s. Coupled with the hard Calvinism of Francis Turretin, it was virtually unavoidable that the American version of Presbyterianism — and other Protestant traditions — would adopt a hard-line position on both slavery and women, a

see evangelical on 15

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