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SILENT CENSORSHIP

It is a tossup as to which is the more artful example of self-serving hokum: the so-called "best-seller lists" used to promote book titles favored by the liberals or the sideshow of "banned books" displayed to encourage naive customers to hurry up and buy liberal books because the First Amendment is allegedly under attack.

For the most part, only liberal-approved books are allowed to appear on the "best-seller lists" even though other books have sold far more than the so-called best-sellers, ~~on the lists.~~ Only liberal-approved books are allowed to wear the martyr's crown of having been a "banned book" even though other types of books are systematically banned from bookstores and libraries.

One of the chief victims of book banning from bookstores and censorshi from best-seller lists has been books with a Christian viewpoint. They are treated as though they don't exist in the general book trade, even though they have piled up sales figures that most books listed on "best-seller lists" cannot equal.

"The Act of Marriage" by the Rev. Tim LaHaye has sold 1.2 million copies since 1979. "Joni" by Joni Eareckson has sold 1.4 million since 1978. "What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women" by Dr. James Dobson has sold one million copies since 1980, and his other books have sold in the hundreds of thousands.

What brought this "silent censorship" out on the table is a nationally organized display appearing in many bookstores across the country in observance of what the American Booksellers Association has proclaimed as "Banned Book Week." This display shows 93 book titles which have allegedly

been challenged or restricted on grounds that they belittle religion, morals, or chastity. The "bad guys" in this book-banning soap opera are parents or taxpayers.

The hypocrisy of it all is just too much. Those attending this year's Christian Booksellers Association convention in Colorado Springs spoke out about the real censorship in books today.

Spokesman Robert P. Alm said bluntly, "Nothing is censored as heavily as Christian ideas and literature in our secular society. Our books have been banned from all but our own best-seller lists, from secular bookstore and from national book review columns."

Anderson pointed out that, even when general bookstores do carry books with a religious perspective on social issues, they are considere "specialty" books and consigned to a "religious ghetto" at the back of the store. The result is that bookstore sections on marriage, divorce, childrearing, death, and other social issues do not include any books with a Christian orientation.

Another spokesman, William R. Anderson, said, "It's a kind of selective, silent censorship, but it's just as damaging as the more overt types. It's an infringement against civil liberties, the right to choose." He talked about how religiously oriented books, even big sellers are ignored by reviewers and general bookstores, and that "tends to keep such books from libraries and schools."

A handful of major book review journals wield enormous power over the stocking of books by bookstores and their purchase for permanent placement in libraries. Major publishers usually don't even try to advertise or sell a book that has been ignored or panned by the liberal book review journals.

The individuals who make up best-seller lists, write book reviews, and manage bookstores have a right to pursue their own prejudices. Likewise, the victims of their prejudices have a right to speak up about

the hypocrisy and the double standards.

Meanwhile, those interested in writing or selling Christian books have succeeded in building a tremendously profitable industry through their own channels and outlets. There obviously is a big market for Christian books, and the general bookstores have simply missed the boat (or the buck).