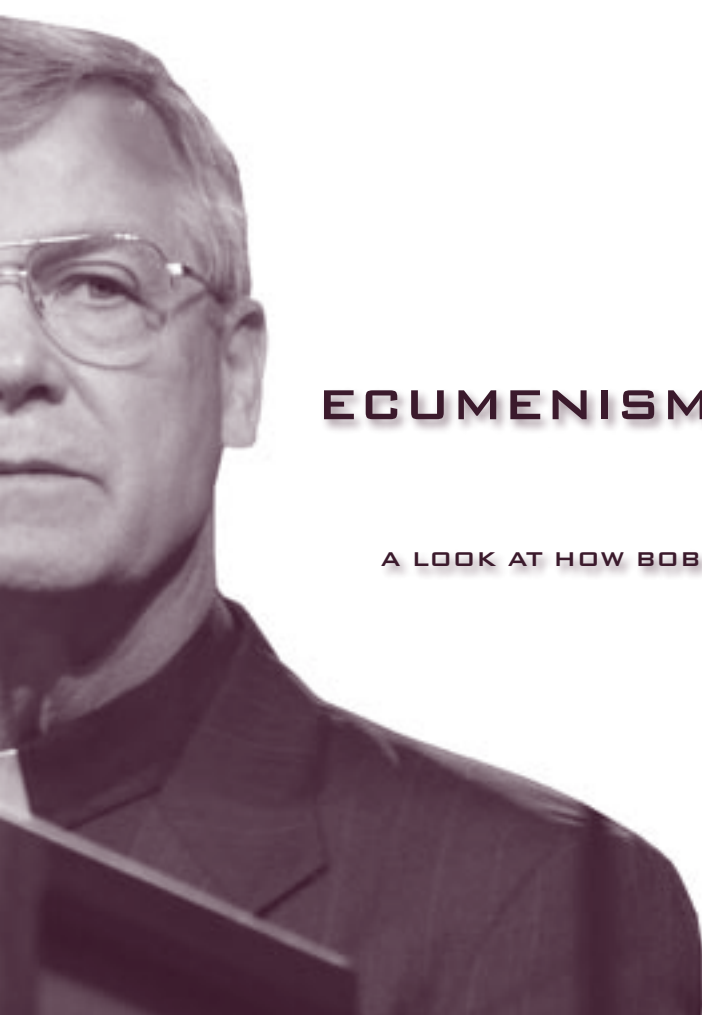


faith & freedom

REFORMING THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL & POLITICAL WITNESS

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NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTNERSHIP FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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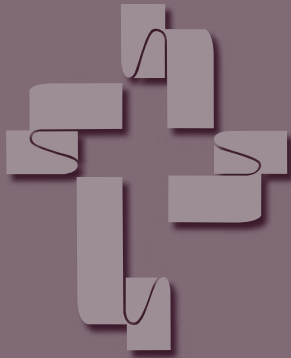
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WITH FROM THE PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS, CHURCH NEWS, IRD DIARY & LETTERS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



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The IRD is a non-profit organization committed to reforming the Church's social and political witness and to building and strengthening democracy and religious liberty at home and abroad. IRD committees work for reform in the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The IRD also sponsors the Church Alliance for a New Sudan and the Liberty Initiative for North Korea.

Contributions to the work of the IRD are critically needed. Your gifts are tax deductible. Thank you for your support.

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LETTERS

A WELCOME ENCOURAGEMENT

I just wanted to e-mail you to pass along encouragement and exhortation to Jim Tonkowich and all of you at the IRD. Sadly, while attacks are probably not new to you all, nevertheless you must wonder if people out there believe all the garbage that they hear in sound bites. I just wanted to let you know that “no” we don’t. Thank you for your work and for the courage to stand up and fight in these last days. Count the suffering joy, you’re in with good company! May the Lord continue to bless you, your ministry and your message.

*Jennifer Eldridge
via email*

OPPOSITE RESPONSES TO UCC CRITICISM, FALL 2005

I have recently become aware of your work. I immediately went to the website of the UCC to make a donation. I see a real and virulent connection between you on the religious right and the Taliban in the Middle East. You are both extremist in your views and intolerant of anyone who differs with you. You reflect a Christ who is cruel, vindictive, punitive, and certainly not of love and mercy. The fact that you seek to infiltrate and divide mainline churches reflects your obvious evil. My God is loving—loving to ALL, no exceptions—and so much larger than yours. How God’s message and personal faith can be so perverted by people like you just makes me weep. May you come to your senses and find the true source of love, Jesus Christ.

*Andrea Girtz
via email*

Please pray for UCC president Thomas and the UCC. They’re in big trouble. Thank you for all you do for the Lord. I know statements like those by Thomas are horrible, but we should not be surprised at the ways Satan will use to stop the truth. I suppose it’s sort of a back-handed compliment. Keep proclaiming the truth, you guys and gals at IRD. I shudder to think what it would be like without you. Stay strong in the Lord. My family and I love you, we are praying for you.

*Gary E.
via email*

HAVE YOU VISITED THE IRD WEBSITE RECENTLY?

The IRD website has all sorts of useful resources for you:

- Resources on issues such as the Middle East Conflict, Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Ecumenism, and IRD’s founding documents on Christianity and democracy.
- Back issues of IRD publications available for download.
- A collection of outrageous quotes from mainline leaders.
- Constantly updated news and analysis of the latest events and controversies within the mainline churches.
- Online polls for you to express your opinion.

WWW.IRD-RENEW.ORG

PHOTOS

Page 4, UMNS/Paul Jeffrey. Page 7, courtesy Compass Direct. Page 12, IRD/John Lomperis. Page 14, courtesy ENS. Page 15, courtesy White House/Susan Sterner.

The Purpose of the IRD: One Church

by James W. Tonkovich



The Institute on Religion and Democracy is:

- an ecumenical alliance of U.S. Christians
- working to reform their churches' social witness, in accord with biblical and historic Christian teachings,
- thereby contributing to the renewal of democratic society at home and abroad.

One sign of a healthy organization is how well the staff gets along and, to me, a measure of good staff relationships is humor. Now I know that the banter between co-workers can be corrosive, but in a healthy organization it doesn't need to be and the IRD office is marked by a great deal of good-natured kidding. The primary topic? Theology: Calvinist, Wesleyan, Anglican, Lutheran. And we enjoy the give and take.

But we can only do this because there is something that unites us that is deeper than our theological and denominational distinctives. The IRD—our staff, board, and supporters—is marked by what IRD board member and theologian Thomas Oden calls “the new ecumenism.” Dr. Oden writes that the old “disappearing ecumenism is determined to create a unity by fudging Christian truth.” In its place is the new ecumenism—which is, in fact, the true and ancient ecumenism that “is determined to seek only a unity defined by truth.” This is reflected in the first clause of our purpose statement. We are “an ecumenical alliance of U.S. Christians.”

While “fundamentalism” has become an increasingly derogatory term often associated with the very antithesis of ecumenism, the fundamentalist movement began in the first decades of the 1900s as a means to “a unity defined by truth.”

The task was to distinguish and defend orthodox Protestant Christianity from the intellectual attacks of the era. Higher criticism and Darwinism seemed to call the veracity of the Bible into question. The Social Gospel brought theological liberalism and secularism into the Church. This obscured the Gospel of Christ crucified and left the Church with little more than a social and political agenda. If this sounds familiar, it's small wonder since we are experiencing the same distressing situation today.

In response, orthodox believers attempted to define and defend the fundamentals of Christian faith and, thus, Christian unity. The key fundamentals included the authority and infallibility of Scripture, the Trinity, and the doctrines of Christ: his virgin birth, his atoning substitutionary sacrificial death on the cross, his physical

resurrection, and his literal second coming—the same doctrines that need defining and defending today.

The movement comprised some of the best theological minds of the day from across Protestantism. It included Presbyterians B.B. Warfield and Charles Hodge, Anglican Bishops J.C. Ryle and H. C. G. Moule, Congregationalists G. Campbell Morgan and R.A. Torrey, Methodist Arno Gaebelein and Baptist Thomas Spurgeon.

Sadly, after these auspicious beginnings, the movement collapsed into the anti-intellectualism and separatism for which fundamentalism became known. But the seeds of unity based on truth were evident and it is from those seeds that the modern evangelical movement has grown. That movement, of which the IRD is a part with orthodox believers inside and outside of the mainline denominations, is the hope for an ecumenism that stands against the secularism and irreligion of our day—in the culture and in the churches.

And this new ecumenism extends beyond Protestantism. As Chuck Colson and IRD board member Richard John Neuhaus write in *Your Word Is Truth*,

Our circumstance is one of unremitting conflict between two distinct and antithetical worldviews, or understandings of reality. The lines of conflict are variously drawn and the combatants are variously defined, but the undeniable contention is between a militantly secular naturalism, on the one side, and, on the other, a biblical understanding of reality as the object of God's creating and redeeming work....

Evangelicals and Catholics together share, and must together contend for, that biblical worldview. Whatever differences there have been between us in the past, and whatever differences persist still today, we stand side by side in contending for the truth of that understanding of reality.

We are, to again use Thomas Oden's words, part of an ecumenical movement “seeking to restore and embody classic Christian truth within and beyond the old divisions.”

New to the IRD, I have seen that in our office banter, in our prayer, and in our hard work together. It is clearly visible in our board and in our denominational action committees. I've heard it from supporters, journalists, scholars, and academics as I've been introducing myself to the ecumenical community of which the IRD is a part. We are in fact “an ecumenical alliance of U.S. Christians” and that is as fundamental to our purpose of “Reforming the Church to Renew Democracy” today as it was 25 years ago at our founding. ✚

This is the first of a three-part series looking at the IRD's Purpose Statement.

METHODIST LOBBYIST CALLS FOR BUSH'S IMPEACHMENT

On March 11, Jim Winkler, head of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) of the United Methodist Church, publicly declared that there is an urgent need to “impeach George W. Bush.” The Methodist lobbyist accused the President of waging an “illegal war of aggression” against Iraq that was “sold on lies.”

Winkler was speaking at “Ecumenical Advocacy Days,” an annual liberal activist conference in Washington, DC, sponsored by the GBCS, other mainline denominational agencies, the National Council of Churches, and several left-leaning Catholic groups. The workshops were led by church activists alongside staffers from secular liberal activist groups and Democratic congressional offices.

Winkler made it clear that he would have opposed the Iraq war “[e]ven if it turned out that Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction” and “could be found culpable” for the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Among the other causes promoted at the conference were environmentalism, reduced military spending to fund expanded government welfare programs, and lifting sanctions against Fidel Castro’s Cuban regime.

Pro-homosexuality themes were prominent at this year’s “Advocacy Days.” Participants were treated to a concert by a lesbian activist duet and a breakfast on gay rights lobbying sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce.

IRD JOINS EFFORT TO PROTECT MARRIAGE

IRD President Jim Tonkowich joined a diverse group of civic and religious leaders who signed public letters supporting the proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Others endorsing the Marriage Protection Amendment included individual leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Convention, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Church of God in Christ, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the Episcopal Church. Also signing were Orthodox Jewish and Mormon officials.

Tonkowich declared in a press release that “[t]he institution of marriage is vital to the health and well-being of the nation.” He said that the extraordinary step of the constitutional amendment was now necessary to “protect that providential institution from judges who would unilaterally impose a radical redefinition.”

The public letter effort is being organized by the Religious Coalition for Marriage, which has more information on its website: www.religiouscoalition-formarriage.org.

‘OPEN MEMBERSHIP’ CONTROVERSY ENGULFS UNITED METHODISTS

Last October, the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church reinstated Virginia pastor Ed Johnson, who had been suspended from the ministry without pay by his bishop, Charlene Kammerer.

Johnson had asked a man to repent of his ongoing homosexual practice before becoming a formal church member. In the meantime, Johnson was counseling the man about his sexual practice, while the man continued to be welcome to attend the church, sing in the choir, and receive communion. But Kammerer, a staunchly “progressive” homosexuality defender, had Johnson punished for not accepting the man into immediate church membership.

After Johnson’s reinstatement, the denomination’s Council of Bishops requested the Judicial Council to reconsider its decision. This request had been pushed by pro-homosexuality caucuses who erroneously claimed that completely “open membership” was “traditional” in Methodism. American Methodist churches historically have emphasized the importance of having church members committed to living a holy life.

In a 5-4 vote May 1, the Judicial Council refused to grant the request for reconsideration.



HER WAY OR THE HIGHWAY? United Methodist Bishop Charlene Kammerer failed in her attempt to remove Ed Johnson from his pulpit for refusing to grant immediate church membership to an unrepentant practicing homosexual.

SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS GAY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS STRENGTHEN TIES

The Institute on Welcoming Resources (IWR), a coalition of pro-homosexuality caucuses in eight mainline Protestant denominations, has announced that it has officially “merged with and will become a program of” the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Foundation, America’s oldest secular gay rights political lobby. In a March 3 press release, NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman declared, “It’s long past time for the secular and faith-based wings of our movement to share resources and expertise and advance as a united movement.” Foreman also described the IWR’s constituent groups as key to political efforts against religious conservatives.

This move comes shortly after the NGLTF released a lengthy guidebook for “secular progressive organizations” seeking to “mobilize” gay-friendly religious bodies and caucuses “into a broader political coalition.” The guidebook criticizes the IRD, which the secular NGLTF alleges is driven by “[s]ecular conservative forces.” It also complains that a pro-homosexuality caucus within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) had actively sought grants from secular “progressive foundations” but had been turned down by several. ✚

UNAUTHORIZED CONSECRATION STRAINS VATICAN-CHINA RELATIONS

Despite recent indications of improved interaction between Beijing and Vatican City, relations between the Holy See and the communist nation have become strained after the consecration of two bishops by the state-sponsored Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

On April 30, Ma Yinglin was made bishop of Kunming in Yunnan province. Three days later, Liu Xinhong was consecrated as bishop of Wuhu in Anhui province. Both consecrations were performed without the approval of Pope Benedict XVI.

"[The consecrations are] a grave wound to the unity of the Church," said Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls in a May 4 statement. "The Holy See has stressed her willingness for honest and constructive dialogue with the competent Chinese authorities to find solutions that would satisfy the legitimate needs of both parties. Initiatives such as the above do not favor such dialogue, but instead create new obstacles against it."

Despite the absence of diplomatic ties between the Vatican and the Chinese government, a tacit agreement had

existed where both parties would provide consent before the consecration of any bishops. Prior to these two consecrations, some observers had speculated that Pope Benedict XVI would establish diplomatic relations with China for the first time in 55 years.

AFGHAN CHRISTIAN CONVERT RELEASED

An Afghan man on trial for converting to Christianity was released from a maximum security prison outside Kabul on March 27, following the dismissal of charges against him.

Abdul Rahman had faced execution for his conversion—a violation of Afghanistan's strict Islamic law that forbids the abandonment of Islam. At his trial, Rahman refused to renounce his new faith. "I respect Afghan law as I respect Islam," he said, "but I chose to become a Christian for myself, for my soul. It is not an offense."

Several human rights organizations, including the IRD, had pressed the Afghan government to drop the case. According to Afghan officials, charges were dismissed due to a lack of evidence.

Since his release, Rahman has established residence in Italy.

In response to the dismissal, hundreds of Afghans marched through the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif chanting, "Death to Christians!"

Bishop Wolfgang Huber, head of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Germany commented, "The fact that [Rahman] cannot remain in Afghanistan is an expression of the deplorable situation that the application of *sharia* in cases of a change of religion contravenes universal human rights."

ANTI-ISRAEL DIVESTMENT LOSING MOMENTUM

Efforts by some Western church bodies to divest from companies dealing with Israel are failing to produce sufficient member support.

In 2004, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) became the first church body to pass a resolution initiating the removal of church assets from corporations dealing with Israel. Subsequent proposals to use "economic leverage" have been raised

in various church bodies in Europe and North America, including the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States.

Such proposals have apparently failed to take root. In April, the Anglican Church of Canada announced it had "no intention at this time" of divesting from Israel. The United Methodist Church has repeatedly deferred attempts to implement a divestment plan. And despite a vote in February 2006 by the General Synod of the Church of England to divest from companies whose products are used by Israel in the Palestinian territories, the Church's Ethical Investment Advisory Group claimed it found "no compelling evidence" to implement such a plan.

In an April meeting of the PCUSA General Assembly Council, Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase proposed the creation of a task force to monitor the situation in the Middle East for two years. The proposal is seen as an attempt to stave off more than 20 local presbyteries that want to end the divestment process this year.

WCC, VATICAN SEEK COMMON STATEMENT ON CONVERSION

Representatives from the World Council of Churches met with Vatican officials May 12-16 to discuss a "common code" of conduct regarding religious conversion.

Representatives from various Christian traditions gathered in Rome to begin a study on the nature of conversion in the modern world. The study hopes to distinguish between permissible "witness" and impermissible "proselytism," with an emphasis on respecting freedom of conscience.

"The issue of religious conversion remains a controversial dimension in many interconfessional and interreligious relations," said the Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko of the WCC Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue. "We hope that at the end of this study project, we will be able to propose a code of conduct that will affirm that commitment to our faith never translates into denigration of the other."

The three-year study will include participation from members of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish traditions, as well as representatives of various indigenous religions.

YOUR LETTERS ARE WELCOME!

We at IRD would love to hear your opinions about the issues we report on in *Faith & Freedom*. We think our readers would also be interested in hearing your opinions. Why not drop us a letter? Because space is limited, please keep your notes short. Letters may also be edited for space, if necessary.

e-mail us your thoughts at:
mail@ird-renew.org

or mail your letter to us:

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Cuba: A Case of Infidelity to the Persecuted Church

by Faith McDonnell

In 2004, IRD's analysis of the human rights criticisms by the U.S. mainline Protestant churches revealed that a full two-thirds of those criticisms were aimed at the United States or Israel. These denominations' approach rather resembles that of the United Nations. The UN has rarely met a condemnation of Israel that it didn't like, and its member nations are eager to denounce the United States at every possible opportunity. Another commonality between the UN and the mainline churches: they have no big problems with Cuba's human rights record.

By way of demonstration, on May 9 2006, Cuba secured a seat on the new, "reformed" UN Human Rights Council. Fidel Castro's island regime, alongside other dubious exemplars of freedom such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, was awarded a three-year membership on the body that was created to replace the discredited old Commission on Human Rights.

The BBC reported that the U.S. envoy to the UN, John Bolton, said Cuba's inclusion "simply says that the deficiencies from the previous commission may well now still be carried over." The Cuban government welcomed its election as a "resounding victory" and a snub to Uncle Sam.

Also by way of demonstration, leaders in the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recently have chosen to "snub" the United States and once again give Cuba a fairly free pass on matters of human rights. Like the UN, the mainline officials continue to carry their deficiencies of vision.

In late February 2006, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Frank Griswold, led a group of Episcopal staffers on an official visit, hosted by the Episcopal Church of Cuba. During his six days in Havana, Griswold denounced U.S. policy towards Cuba as "inhuman." But he had no equal words of condemnation for the Cuban dictatorship. He said nothing of the Christians and other dissidents who languish in the 300 prisons that have spread like sores across the island since Castro's revolution.

Bishop Griswold celebrated World Mission Sunday, February 26, by preaching at Havana's Cathedral of the Holy Trinity. He condemned the U.S. trade embargo or "blockade" and faulted it for the dire state of the Cuban economy. "I have been saddened to see the suffering caused by the policies of my country's government," the bishop lamented. Yet just a few miles from where he stood preaching, he could have seen the suffering caused by the policies of Cuba's government.

Even while the bishop was packing his bags for the pastoral visit, Cuban authorities were targeting their latest Christian pastor. Compass Direct News Service, March 2, 2006, reported that the

Rev. Carlos Lamelas was arrested on the morning of February 20 in his home. The police confiscated the computer and other personal items of the evangelical pastor and former denominational national president of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana).

Lamelas was accused of aiding emigrants who sought to leave the country illegally. But sources in Havana told Compass Direct that the allegations against Lamelas were part of a harassment campaign "aimed at silencing a dynamic religious leader." Lamelas is still being held without charge.

In his World Mission Sunday sermon, Griswold grieved, "My country's policies have driven wedges through your country, wedges that are profoundly at odds with the Scriptural call to unity among all people in Christ." There was no word of the wedge that Castro has driven through the country with his harassment and persecution of all who criticize his government or try to escape its control.

Griswold also stated that the "Episcopal Church in the United States strongly opposes the blockade against Cuba." He declared that "in the four decades of its existence, the blockade has done little except exacerbate the suffering of the Cuban people."

The suffering of blind Cuban Christian dissident Juan Carlos González Leiva was not mentioned by Bishop Griswold. González Leiva described the harsh treatment he was receiving at the hands of Castro's government in a January 14, 2006, letter published by Christian Solidarity Worldwide. While under house arrest for opposing the communist regime, he and his family were continuously harassed.

"They [government-directed mobs] prevent me from leaving my house, and I am without food, drinking water, and electricity," the dissident wrote. "We are suffocating from the heat... Those surrounding my home pound on my windows and my doors, and they have placed loudspeakers outside with blaring music 24 hours a day that prevents us from sleeping or resting. The mobs... range from criminals to university students that are brought to shout governmental slogans in aggressive language and obscene words through microphones. These people shout threats at us, saying that they are going to enter the house with military tanks, that they are going to burn all of us up, and that we are antisocial persons at the service of imperialism."

If González Leiva were an Islamist terrorist at Guantánamo Bay enduring this sort of torment, all sorts of American church leaders would be speaking out for him. But, alas, he is only a Christian dissident, and his tormentors are not Americans.

Griswold had a heart-to-heart meeting with President Fidel Castro a few days later. According to the Episcopal News Service

IMPRISONED WITHOUT CHARGE. The Rev. Carlos Lamelas, pictured here with his family, was arrested by Cuban authorities on February 20. Only a few days later, ECUSA Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold blamed U.S. policies for Cuba's problems, ignoring the oppressive police-state tactics of Castro to beat down political dissent.

(ENS), Castro told Bishop Griswold in their 2-1/2 hour discussion that “no one has all the truth.” Griswold agreed with the dictator, saying that “truth is larger than any one perspective” and that “truth is always unfolding.”

Griswold did raise “implicit concerns about the civil and political rights of the Cuban people—particularly the right to dissent publicly from government policies,” ENS reported. But it is not enough to raise “implicit” concerns, particularly while seeming to agree that there is no objective truth.

Rick Ufford-Chase, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), visited the island a few weeks after Griswold, in April. The Presbyterian leader took a somewhat different approach. He did not hold any meetings with Cuban government officials, explaining that his visit was strictly pastoral.

When Ufford-Chase preached at First Presbyterian Church of Havana, he made some allusions to difficulties experienced by the Cuban Christians. “This is a church that has passed through incredibly difficult moments of crucifixion, in which the church of the 1970s and 1980s almost died on the vine.” Ufford-Chase did not identify the crucifiers, nor did he indicate whether they continued their bloody practices.

The Presbyterian moderator also voiced concern about “the growing lack of even the most basic services that everyone knows is a reality in your country.” He did not say whose policies might be the cause of these privations.

Ufford-Chase spoke, too, about Cuba’s “double economy”—the thriving black market that operates alongside the government-controlled enterprises—that creates economic “haves” and “have-nots.” He considered this situation ironic “in a land where there has been so clear a commitment to basic equality, fairness and equity.” This last phrase suggested a rather rosy view of the Cuban communist system.

By contrast, the PCUSA official had much harsher and more direct criticism of the U.S. government. He preached about “the growing conviction that terror rules our

world and that we [the United States] must dominate the entire world, even attacking without provocation those whom we think might attempt to harm us.”

Ufford-Chase seemed most upset about U.S. limitations on permits for religious leaders to make visits like his own. “We are asking our government for more openness, more opportunities to make these pastoral visits to Cuba for religious leaders,” he told a Spanish news service. He made no such public request for more openness on the part of the Cuban government.

The moderator was also bothered that “there is a belief in the U.S. government that there is no freedom to practice religion in Cuba.” On the contrary, he insisted, “After a week here, obviously that is not true. It is obvious that the churches here are active and are growing and are doing so openly.” Ufford-Chase added, somewhat vaguely, that “there are also concerns about the openness to function as churches in all respects.”

These allegations that the U.S. government denied the existence of a church in Cuba seemed to set up a straw man, diverting attention from the real limitations on religious liberty on the island. In fact, the U.S. State Department Human Rights Report for 2005 explains the situation much more carefully than either Ufford-Chase or Griswold.

That report states, “Although the [Cuban] constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law, the government continued to restrict freedom of religion.” It notes that Cuban churches are required to register with the government. “Officials frequently harassed and repressed unregistered religious



groups,” the State Department reported.

“The Ministry of Interior engaged in active efforts to control and monitor religious institutions, particularly through surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and practitioners,” according to the report. “The government, with rare exceptions, prohibited the construction of new churches, forcing many growing congregations to seek permits to meet in private homes.” Such permits were subject to strict limits.

One would never guess this reality from reading the statements of U.S. mainline church officials. And the effects of this relative silence are greater than the church officials may realize.

The Cuban poet and former political prisoner Armando Valladares, in accepting the IRD’s 1983 Religious Freedom Award, explained, “Every time that a pamphlet was published in the United States, every time a clergyman would write an article in support of Fidel Castro’s dictatorship, a translation would reach us and that was worse for the Christian political prisoners than the beatings or the hunger.”

“While we waited for the solidarity embrace from our brothers in Christ,” Valladares said, “incomprehensively to us, those who were embraced were our tormentors.” Every U.S. church leader who visits Cuba should take a vow that he will never betray Castro’s prisoners in this manner. Today, Carlos Lamelas and Juan Carlos González Leiva still wait for the solidarity embrace. ✚

NCC Finds a New Base

Foundations Eclipse Member Denominations as Source of Funding

by John Lomperis and Alan Wisdom

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) is defined, in its constitution, as “a community of Christian communions, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord.” The NCC website boasts that it is “the leading force for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States.” The council typically issues political pronouncements in the name of “the churches,” “the religious community,” and “people of faith.”

For 25 years the IRD has questioned whether the NCC truly speaks for the 45 million believers in its 35 member denominations. The council’s uniformly liberal positions—opposing almost all U.S. military involvements, minimizing human rights concerns about hostile states such as North Korea and Cuba, pushing for an ever-larger welfare state, resisting tax cuts, promoting ever-tighter government regulation of business—have not corresponded to the moderate and conservative views of most active church members.

Inevitably, however, the political alienation between the council and its claimed constituency begot a financial alienation. Gifts from member denominations dropped through the 1980s and 1990s. By 1999 the NCC was in desperate financial straits. Amidst multi-million dollar debt, unsustainable deficit spending, and open talk of the council’s possible dissolution, the NCC brought in a new general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar. With his fundraising experience as a Democratic congressman and then a seminary president, Edgar was the NCC’s last hope for material salvation.

Edgar has been widely credited with rescuing the dying church council from collapse. But the NCC’s fiscal stabilization has not resulted from a renewed surge of support among member denominations committed to Christian unity. In fact, those gifts have continued to decline, from \$2.9 million in fiscal year 2000-2001 to \$1.75 million in 2004-2005—a drop of 40 percent.

MATERIAL SALVATION

Instead the council was saved by other means—means that have brought about a little-noticed transformation in the NCC’s identity. First, Edgar granted financial and administrative autonomy

to the NCC-affiliated Church World Service relief agency. Then he trimmed expenses sharply in what remained of the council. The NCC staff shrank from over 100 in early 2000 to fewer than 40 today. Its programs are a shadow of their former selves.

Most importantly, Edgar has pursued new income from non-church sources. The NCC’s “other” income has grown from \$600,000 in 2000-2001 to \$2.9 million in 2004-2005—a nearly five-fold increase.

By far the largest infusion—almost by itself saving the council—was a single \$6 million gift in 2003 from an anonymous woman who died in that same year. According to the general secretary, she was not a member of any of the council’s member communions. Her donation was made in appreciation for the council’s “peace work”—i.e., its criticisms of U.S. military actions—rather than anything it might have done for Christian unity.

New support has also come via direct mail fundraising. The

pitch here, too, is primarily to political rather than Christian convictions. For example, a letter last summer asked for gifts to the council in order to defeat the alleged totalitarian ambitions of a vast right-wing conspiracy involving

President Bush, Rush Limbaugh, James Dobson, and the IRD, among others. With one oblique exception, there was no mention of Jesus Christ, nor of the NCC’s ostensible mission of seeking unity among his followers.

The NCC letter used “we” as a synonym for “the religious left,” and it reported proudly that the council “works closely with” the leftist, partisan Democratic MoveOn.org and TrueMajority.org. Obviously, the NCC had become a very different sort of organization than the one described in its constitution.

The NCC has also sought and received funding from secular liberal foundations. In fact, in the fiscal year ending June 2005, the NCC received \$1.76 million from foundations. This total surpassed the \$1.75 million that year from member communions, and it signaled a radical new development in the council’s history.

THE NEW FUNDERS

In analyzing the council’s financial statements for the last two completed fiscal years, we found a number of surprising funding

The NCC’s fiscal stabilization has not resulted from a renewed surge of support among member denominations committed to Christian unity.

sources for a church group that has as its primary purpose seeking Christian unity. The NCC documents reveal a large number of non-church funding sources in fiscal year 2004-2005 (see table below).

These gifts are far greater than the donations that the NCC receives from most of its member denominations whose public voice it purports to be. In the 2004-2005 fiscal year only six denominations gave more than \$50,000 to the council: the United Methodist Church (\$596,000), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (\$402,000), the Episcopal Church (\$228,000), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (\$142,000), the American Baptist Churches (\$90,000), and the United Church of Christ (\$74,000). For the remaining 30 NCC member communions, the average contribution was less than \$8,000.

With one exception, these NCC-supporting foundations and groups do not have any explicit Christian or religious commitment. The vast majority of the causes they support are secular, and those causes lean heavily to the political left.

While some of the groups, such as the Knight Foundation and the AARP, are moderately liberal, others, such as the Tides Foundation, are radically leftist. Tides

supports causes that include promoting homosexual rights, abolishing the death penalty, and fighting any restrictions on abortion. Among the Tides grantees are the communist-initiated National Lawyers Guild and the radical anti-capitalist protest groups the Ruckus Society and the Barrio Warriors.

STRANGE YOKEFELLOWS IN THE CAUSE OF 'CHRISTIAN UNITY'

While the NCC has no official position on abortion or homosexuality, many of its largest foundation supporters are staunchly pro-abortion rights and pro-homosexuality. Edgar and other liberal NCC leaders probably do not object to these positions, but they may be more troubling to the council's more conservative member communions—such as the Eastern Orthodox and the historically African-American churches.

In addition, there are groups that do not fund the NCC but that have been acknowledged by the council as its close partners in joint political efforts. These include:

- MoveOn.org, the political activist group founded in 1998 to oppose the impeachment of President Clinton. According to the non-partisan Center for Responsive Politics, “the MoveOn PAC spends millions of dollars to support the election of Democratic candidates.” MoveOn pledged \$100,000 to the NCC in 2003-2004, although the money appears never to have been sent.
- True Majority, a far-left internet activist group established by ice cream magnate Ben Cohen. The True Majority website has fea-

tured a crude anti-Bush song that excoriated the President for being a “frat boy jerk” and an “aristocrat goon.” True Majority co-sponsors the NCC’s “Faithful America” advocacy website for “the progressive faith community.” Ben Cohen pledged \$100,000 to the council in 2003-2004.

- People for the American Way (PFAW), the organization founded in 1981 by Hollywood producer Norman Lear to oppose the emerging “Religious Right.” PFAW has been prominent in stirring up opposition to conservative judicial nominees. It participated in the NCC’s “Let Justice Roll” campaign to influence the 2004 elections. A featured speaker at the closing Let Justice Roll rally was anti-Bush filmmaker Michael Moore. The NCC’s Edgar described the campaign as “non-partisan work for regime change,” using the phrase “regime change” as a code for the defeat of President Bush.

A DOUBLE STANDARD

It is curious, in light of the NCC’s own funding and programmatic partnerships, that the council has faulted the IRD for receiving support from conservative foundations. On at least three recent occasions, the NCC has approvingly cited inaccuracy-ridden denunciations of the IRD. These NCC-endorsed articles essentially portray the IRD as a sinister conspiracy to take control of the churches for right-wing political purposes. They insinuate that IRD’s receipt of funding from some foundations that also support secular conservative groups proves that the institute is un-Christian and untrustworthy. One wonders if NCC leaders would be willing to subject their own funding to similar scrutiny.

It should be noted that there are some important differences between the NCC and the IRD:

- The NCC is a church body, supposedly focused on achieving unity among all Christian churches and believers in the United States. Actions and alliances that pit the council against large portions

SOURCE	AMOUNT
1. United Methodist Church	\$596,233
2. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	\$410,550
3. National Religious Partnership for the Environment	\$344,514
4. Knight Foundation	\$300,000
5. Episcopal Church USA	\$228,120
6. Tides Foundation	\$225,000
7. Ford Foundation	\$150,000
8. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	\$142,500
9. WK Kellogg Foundation	\$141,450
10. Rockefeller Brother's Fund	\$100,000
11. American Baptist Church	\$89,750
12. American Association of Retired Persons	\$85,000
13. Wyss Foundation	\$80,000
14. United Church of Christ	\$74,000
15. Sierra Club	\$60,000
16. Connect US Network	\$50,000
TOTAL FOUNDATION, ORGANIZATION, AND OTHER GRANT REVENUE (7/2004-6/2005)	\$1,761,714
TOTAL MEMBER DENOMINATION REVENUE (7/2004-6/2005)	\$1,750,332

EDGAR'S LEDGER. Large grants from foundations in 2004-2005 dwarf all but the biggest denominational gifts. Ten of the 16 top donations are from non-church sources (usually for explicitly political work such as environmental or anti-war advocacy).

of those churches and believers—the conservatives and the Republicans, in particular—are deeply destructive to its purported ecumenical mission. The IRD, by contrast, is a parachurch group devoted to advancing a particular set of convictions about democracy and Christian faith. Naturally, it draws most of its support from moderate and conservative Christians who share those convictions.

- The NCC receives little funding directly from individual church members—many of whom would not support its one-sided political focus. Instead it relies on checks transmitted from a few denominational headquarters—and now, more significantly, on checks sent from secular liberal foundations. By contrast, the IRD receives the clear majority of its income from individual church members. Those members know and support the IRD’s theological and political positions.
- The NCC lobbies for or against legislation on dozens of different issues every year. The invariably liberal positions that it advocates are in close step with the positions championed by the council’s donor foundations—and frequently out of step with the views of most church members. By contrast, it is rare that the IRD takes positions on specific pieces of legislation. IRD publications affirm basic ethical teachings from the Scriptures and Christian tradition, leaving it to church members to apply those teachings politically. We criticize mainline church leaders because they depart from and go beyond those basic teachings—not because we would wish them to take the opposite position on every piece of legislation.
- In its lobbying, the NCC claims to speak for “the churches”—even though the churches are no longer the council’s principal source of funding. By contrast, the IRD has never claimed to speak for anyone other than its own friends and supporters who share its convictions.
- The NCC and its allies have been trying to influence the outcome of elections,

by registering and “educating” voters in a way that clearly favors Democratic candidates. By contrast, the IRD has never endorsed a candidate for office—directly or indirectly. It operates no voter registration or “education” programs.

THE REAL QUESTION: IS THIS A DIFFERENT ORGANIZATION?

We should be clear that there is no necessary sin in a Christian organization—the NCC, the IRD, or the Salvation Army—accepting contributions from persons or groups who may not themselves be Christian. No local church can verify the spiritual status or check the motives of every person who drops a bill into the collection plate. All gifts should be received gratefully and turned toward the Lord’s work, as best we understand it.

The problems come when the non-church funding becomes so large that it cannot help but change the nature of a

Is the NCC’s work really centered on “confess[ing] Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord”?

Christian organization. Then serious questions arise: Are the non-church funders dictating the programs and positions of the Christian organization? Or are organization leaders reshaping their programs to fit the priorities of the funders?

We take these questions seriously at the IRD. We can say with confidence that none of our foundations has ever dictated a position for the IRD to take on any issue. We have never shied away from an issue for fear of offending a foundation.

Can NCC leaders make the same affirmation? If virtually all NCC member denominations teach that marriage is and must be only between one man and one woman (as they do in fact teach), would the NCC be willing to proclaim that teaching publicly? Or would it keep silent for fear of offending its liberal funding base? So far the council’s record is one of silence on the marriage issue. In 2000, under pressure from pro-homosexuality groups, Bob Edgar withdrew his endorsement of the ecumenical “Christian Declaration

on Marriage” that supported traditional marriage.

DUCKING THE QUESTION

These sorts of questions have surfaced within NCC circles on at least three occasions—without receiving a clear answer. At the spring 2004 meeting of the NCC Executive Board, one board member suggested that “we need to match [NCC] programs” to align with the goals of the foundations whose money was being sought. This remark passed without further discussion.

A report adopted by the 2004 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) noted: “In recent years, an increasing source of income [for the NCC] has come from foundation grants and individual and other contributions.” The Presbyterian report later asked: “Does non-church funding received by the NCC and CWS [Church World Service] unduly impact the agenda of the organization?” It

went on to state, “There are some examples of influence on the agenda of the NCC by its partnerships with foundations and organizations that have their own agendas.”

The report provided no further details about the problem.

In February 2005, the NCC’s own outside consultant asked its leaders to consider how the council’s activity might be affected by the growing influence on the council of secular funders at the expense of NCC member churches. Again, the question was not resolved.

So the questions remain open: Is the NCC still fundamentally “a community of Christian communions”? Is its work really centered on “confess[ing] Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord”? Or has it become a different sort of organization—much more political, much more partisan? With the council’s increasing dependency on secular liberal foundations, will it ever be able to return to its original purpose? ✚

This article is a summary of a special IRD report entitled “Strange Yokefellows: The National Council of Churches and Its Growing Non-Church Constituency.” You may obtain an electronic copy of that report in the “Resources” section of the IRD website: www.ird-renew.org.

Presbyterians Face Watershed Assembly

by Jim Berkley

This year the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is heading into a General Assembly of heightened volatility. The June 15–22 gathering in Birmingham, Alabama, will consider the question of standards for sexual conduct of ordained church officers. This sensitive subject, however, is merely the presenting problem, when actually Presbyterians differ about larger issues of Christian morality and the authority of the Bible.

Since the seventies, revisionists have been trying to set aside God's providential design for human sexuality in the marriage of one man and one woman. They want the church to ordain as ministers, elders, and deacons persons engaged in homosexual practice—or non-marital heterosexual practice, for that matter.

The frustrated revisionists have tried repeatedly to delete the requirement that ordained church officers should live in “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.” But local presbyteries have defeated these efforts time after time—by increasing margins.

Now a new strategy involves both a frontal assault and a more indirect attack on the standards. The frontal assault comes in the form of overtures from some two dozen presbyteries to strike “fidelity and chastity” from the *Book of Order*. The indirect approach comes through the long-awaited report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. Its recommendation #5 would leave the “fidelity and chastity” standard on paper. But it would open an easy path for revisionist congregations and presbyteries to ignore the standard and ordain persons involved in non-marital sexual relationships. They would merely have to declare the standard to be “non-essential.”

All the previous elements that have marked the “fidelity and chastity” standard as an essential point of Christian morality would cease to bind PCUSA governing bodies, if the task force proposal is adopted. This momentous departure from the Christian tradition could be accomplished by a simple majority at a single General Assembly.

OPPOSING ISRAEL DIVESTMENT

The enormous imbroglio over the 2004 General Assembly resolution to divest from corporations doing business in Israel has sparked approximately two dozen overtures to reverse, substantially amend, or reaffirm the 2004 resolution.

Many Presbyterians, including IRD's Presbyterian Action committee, saw the divestment measure as one-sided, punitive, and counter-productive. It treated Israel as a pariah state—as if it were the only barrier to peace and the worst human-rights violator in the Middle East. Our Jewish friends were outraged, and Presbyterian-Jewish relationships were strained. Mideast peace was not advanced.

Presbyterian Action has been working with the newly formed Committee to End Divestment Now (www.enddivestment.org) to seek a fairer and more open Presbyterian consideration of Middle East issues. Reversing the divestment action is a necessary starting point.

On Friday, June 16, at 12:30, Presbyterian Action and the Committee to End Divestment Now are bringing in former CIA

director James Woolsey to speak at a brief meeting of commissioners and observers. Woolsey is a passionate Presbyterian who is dead-set against the injustice and illogic of Israel divestment.

SUSTAINING MARRIAGE

The bedrock institution of marriage is suffering from numerous efforts at subversion. Several presbytery overtures this year seek to clarify that Presbyterians understand marriage to be only between one man and one woman—and that this definition is given “for the wellbeing of the entire human family,” as the PCUSA constitution states.

The overtures seek to underscore God's intent for marriage, counter same-sex unions and cohabitation, and conform PCUSA materials and public statements to the denomination's established teachings on marriage. Presbyterian Action seeks to move Presbyterians away from the bleeding edge of worldly sexual license.

These measures also would reverse a 2004 mistake, when the Assembly endorsed “civil unions” joining same-sex couples. Should this year's pro-marriage overtures pass, the PCUSA's Washington lobby would have to stop promoting such unions and start informing Congress that the denomination still believes that marriage is only between one man and one woman.

This General Assembly offers an opportunity for Presbyterians to speak a clear word of moral decency, direct from the Bible and the PCUSA confessions.

NUMEROUS OTHER FLASHPOINTS

As many as 150 overtures and commissioners' resolutions are expected. Consider these topics:

Globalization. A 92-page paper on economics and trade is being presented by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy. Those few commissioners who succeed in reading through this dense and practically incomprehensible document will discover its consistent hostility to the United States, private enterprise, and the free market.

The Trinity. A new theological paper initially affirms the invocation of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Then it launches into enthusiastic paeans to a “trinitarian imagination” that invents formulations such as “Compassionate Mother, Beloved Child, and Life-Giving Womb.”

Abortion. Overtures that seek to limit a broadly permissive policy will test whether the PCUSA can give even the gentlest counsel against any particular form of abortion.

Per capita and property. Overtures seek to tighten or loosen current provisions that expect (but do not require) local churches to pay a “per capita assessment” and that assert that all church property is held in trust for the denomination. Being held together as a denomination by coercion and confiscation would not seem to be a Christian virtue.

Socio-political issues. Overtures relating to farm workers; immigration; torture; sex trafficking; tropical diseases; crises in Sudan, Congo, and Haiti; and a number of other issues spell out the particular Christian concerns of various presbyteries.

PRESBYTERIAN ACTION IN ACTION IN BIRMINGHAM

Presbyterian Action will be bringing solid information, sound analysis, warm encouragement, General Assembly savvy, biblical counsel, and prayer to the volatile mix at this watershed General Assembly. We pray that, by God's grace, this contribution will help commissioners navigate through the fog of confusion and controversy. ✚

New Ecumenical Leader Decries “False Religion” of Fellow Christians

by John Lomperis

We at the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) have long been critical of the National Council of Churches (NCC), arguing that it appears to have abandoned its founding goal of working for unity among U.S. Christians. Instead the council now seems more eager to champion a divisive political agenda that lacks a clear biblical mandate. In so doing, it often picks fights with more theologically and politically conservative Christians.

Perhaps, however, a new face might bring a fresh approach. At the beginning of this year, the Rev. Michael E. Livingston, Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches, succeeded Bishop Thomas Hoyt of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church as NCC president. Livingston will serve a two-year term as the top officer of the council’s Governing Board. He joins General Secretary Robert Edgar atop the leadership chart at the NCC.

I was an eager reader of one of Livingston’s first public speeches as NCC president. Unfortunately, it suggests that little significant change in the council’s direction should be expected from his leadership. Speaking to a meeting of the NCC Communications Commission in Cleveland, Ohio, the new NCC leader lashed out at a vaguely defined group of fellow Christians.

According to Livingston, these other Christians are responsible for linking the Christian faith with “the noise we hear so persistently and loudly; the noise that divides, that blames, that ridicules, that labels.” Complaining of insufficient attention being paid to the NCC, Livingston asserted that “[m]ainline Protestant and Orthodox churches have been pounded into irrelevancy by the media machine of a false religion; a political philosophy masquerading as gospel; an economic principle wrapped in religious rhetoric and painted red, white and blue.” It seems here that the new NCC president can at least hold his own in the categories of dividing, blaming, ridiculing, and labeling.

And who might be these Christian noisemakers that the NCC president resents so much? It appears that Livingston was anathematizing fellow Christians who hold more conservative political views. Those would include, of course, millions of members of the NCC’s 35 denominations, as well as tens of millions of other Christians with whom the council is supposed to seek unity.

According to the NCC president, “it is the job of some of us to tell the story so that the noise [of all those other Christians] ... is not

the only reality, is not the thing that comes to mind when one thinks of ‘church’ or ‘Christian.’” He expressed the hope that his audience of NCC-affiliated communicators could “rival the domination of the kind of programming characteristic of the Fox enterprise”—a favorite bugaboo of political liberals.

“Tell our story,” Livingston urged his audience. “By any means necessary.” This story “is good news; it’s gospel,” he declared. He called it “one good story to change the world and save us from ourselves.” Here is how the NCC president defined this saving gospel that he proclaimed:

Get it out there, this truth about the human condition and the work of the church, these churches, this one effort of millions of Christians alongside and through NCC/CWS to live in obedience to the word of the one who sends us into the world: When you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it unto me. It all comes down to this, love God and your neighbor.

This oblique reference to “the one who sends us into the world” was the only mention of Jesus Christ in the entire speech. It was notable, too, that the reference was only to Christ’s ethical teachings—not at all to the work of salvation that he accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. Indeed, the “story” that Livingston wanted to tell seemed to be mostly about the NCC and its works in Christ’s name, rather than about the work of Jesus himself.

It was a very politicized story. Livingston especially applauded the work of FaithfulAmerica.org, an NCC-run website dedicated to such left-wing political causes as defending abortion rights, denouncing the Iraq War, and advocating higher taxes for more federal government services. Underscoring its political rather than Christian foundation, the FaithfulAmerica website does not hesitate to lambaste more conservative Christians while boasting of its

Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Wiccan members.

Livingston lamented that “we’re gentle as doves but not always wise as serpents.” In my experience, the NCC staff has a curious way of exhibiting its dovishness. When I sought an interview with the newly-installed Livingston, NCC staffer Wesley Pattillo refused flatly. Pattillo went on angrily to denounce IRD for “opposing gay and lesbian people”—even though IRD’s position on sexuality (disapproving of sex outside of marriage while urging compassionate ministry with those caught in sexual sin) is no different from the official position of almost all of the NCC’s 35 member communions. At that same event, Vince Isner, Director of the FaithfulAmerica website, repeatedly denounced my co-workers as “dogs.”

While 20 months still remain in Livingston’s term as NCC president, this early salvo hardly encourages optimism about a new era of ecumenical rapprochement.



HOLDING HIS OWN. NCC president Livingstone accused conservatives of being divisive, ridiculing and labeling, and then went on to label conservative Christians as following a “false gospel” which is merely a “political philosophy” and “economic principle.”



Environmental Policy and the Recreation of Eden

by Jim Tonkovich

The following address by IRD President Jim Tonkovich was presented as part of an Earth Day briefing by the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance entitled "Pulpits, Pews, and Environmental Policy." The briefing took place on Capitol Hill April 19, 2006.

It's hard to believe that it's thirty years ago, but thirty years ago—almost to the date—I was with a group of college friends hiking Mount Washington from the west. We went up the Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail to Lake of the Clouds. It was a bright sunny day and relatively warm for April in New Hampshire. The spring melt was pouring down the ravine in wonderful eddies and waterfalls, and there was still plenty of snow above timberline for some snow climbing to the summit. What a day.

In fact we enjoyed it so much that six weeks later we were back. It was another exquisite day, though warmer and with much of the snow already gone. And by mid-way up the trail, I was furious. The Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail is a popular trail and over the Memorial Day weekend great throngs of kids hiked it and had very effectively trashed it. Soda cans, candy wrappers, and used baggies were strewn all over the trail. On our way down we filled some bags with the trash trying to restore what God had put there.

Now someone might be tempted to think that this is a great analogy for the story of the Bible, a story of restoration. The biblical story begins in a garden—fresh, newly created. The story evokes visions of a pristine wilderness area bursting with lush growth. At least that's how I imagine it.

Then came the breaking of God's law—the Fall.

"Cursed is the ground because of you," said God. "Through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Gen. 3:17b-19)

Driven out of Eden, the story of humanity and of our relationship with God as we've trodden this cursed ground seems as though it should end up back in the Garden. Doesn't it? All the trash would be cleaned up and the marvelous, all-natural freshness of Eden restored. Just as my college friends and I picked trash as we came down the Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail, so the Earth would be picked clean of human encroachment.

It's tempting to think about it that way, but, in the final analysis, the Bible is not a story of restoration. It's a story of recreation. "Behold," God says in Revelation 21, "I'm making everything new." Eden will not be restored. Instead something better will happen: all things will be recreated—recreated with an unexpected twist. The grand story that began in a garden doesn't end in a garden. It ends in a City—a city with a garden running through its heart (like Manhattan), but a city nonetheless.

Let's think about this for a moment. What is a city? It's an artifact—or, more accurately, a whole complex of artifacts. Cities are not created out of nothing, but by shaping the stuff of creation. This final city, the New Jerusalem, descends out of Heaven to the New Earth.

It's a perfect city, but it's a city. Not organic, not growing, but fashioned and shaped out of stone and wood and metal. The Bible values humans as makers who take the raw materials of creation—stone, trees, mineral ores—and create. In fact, the creation is incomplete without human beings to shape it. Even in the Garden, God called humans to tend the Garden and rule Earth's creatures. The Bible sees human activity as a positive good in the midst of creation. We shape and improve what we are given in creation. So a city is a complex of artifacts.

Second, a city is a habitation for people—people who belong on the Earth. Dr. Jay Richards of the Acton Institute tells of receiving a letter from "a leading botanist at a prominent scientific institution."

"The letter," Richards writes, "was mostly agreeable and even complimentary. But near the end, when humanity became the subject, its tone darkened. The scientist said he disagreed with me that human beings were part of the plan, as it were. On the contrary, he complained about 'the devastation humans are currently imposing upon our planet,' writing:

'Still, adding over seventy million new humans to the planet each year, the future looks pretty bleak to me. Surely, the Black Death was one of the best things that ever happened to Europe: elevating the worth of human labor, reducing environmental degradation, and, rather promptly, producing the Renaissance. From where I sit, planet Earth could use another major human pandemic, and pronto!'"

Contrary to the sentiment expressed by this scientist, people are NOT "always and everywhere a blight on the landscape," to use naturalist John Muir's phrase. Instead, the biblical view is that Earth was shaped by a benevolent Creator to be the habitat that sustains and enriches human life even as humans sustain and enrich the Earth through human creativity and human industry.

A Christian environmental policy must be one that elevates human beings, that lifts them from poverty and pollution. Writing in the Winter 2006 *Wilson Quarterly*, Bjorn Lomborg, the Danish statistician who says he once held "left-wing Greenpeace views," wrote:

...if we are smart, our main contribution to the global environment 30 years from now will be to have helped lift hundreds of millions out of poverty, sickness, and malnutrition while giving them a chance to compete in our markets. This will make a richer developing world, whose people will clean up the air and water, replant forests, and go green. (p. 40)

Last Saturday my wife and I went to the Cézanne exhibit down the street at the National Gallery. When Cézanne painted landscapes that included homes or villages, he did it in such a way that the homes and villages—and thus the people inhabiting those homes and villages—belonged as surely as the trees and mountains that surrounded them. So if you're hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire or the Blue Ridge of Virginia, if you packed it in, pack it out. By all means, let's clean up the trash (something we in the wealthier nations have done with effectiveness already). But let's remember that human industry and human belonging on Earth must form the basis of any sound environmental policy. ✚

Proposed Episcopal Resolutions Blame Israel, US; Turn Blind Eye to Castro, Hamas

by Erik Nelson

The blessing of homosexual behavior remains the single most significant issue before the General Convention this summer. However, it is important to remember that there are other significant problems with the social witness of the Episcopal Church, including its flawed human rights advocacy.

he Guevara's bloodstained prisons still survive in Fidel Castro's Cuba, filled with yet another generation of dissidents and human rights activists. Not that you would learn this fact from reading the resolution on Cuba offered by the Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns of the Episcopal Church Executive Council.

The Episcopal Church recently released its "Blue Book," containing reports from church committees and commissions which meet throughout the three-year interim between General Conventions. There are also resolutions written by these official bodies for consideration at the General Convention, which is meeting this June in Columbus, Ohio.

The resolution offered on Cuba, A016, does not mention Castro's gulag. The problems that it sees inside Cuba are economic, and it blames these on the United States and its embargo against the communist dictatorship. The resolution calls for "an immediate end to all portions of the United States economic embargo against the Republic of Cuba." It also encourages Episcopalians to visit the country in order to "promote the exchange of religious and political ideals."

Some of Cuba's political ideals include "short-term detention, frequent summonses, threats, eviction, loss of employment and restrictions on movement" for dissidents, according to a report by Amnesty International. These dissidents include many whose stand against the dictatorship is motivated by their Christian faith. They are frequently imprisoned for specious crimes such as "potential dangerousness," which is defined in the Cuban penal code as the "special proclivity of a person to commit crimes, demonstrated by his conduct in manifest contradiction of socialist norms."

The proposed resolution goes on to state that the Episcopal Church "recommit[s] itself at all levels to pray for the reconciliation of the United States and the Republic of Cuba." Perhaps it might also offer prayers for people like Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet, who is now serving a 25-year sentence for flying the Cuban flag upside-down in protest of human rights abuses. Biscet has reportedly experienced beatings, brutal interrogations, threats, and attempted blackmail.

ECUSA Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold visited Cuba in February, meeting with Fidel Castro (see article on page 6). The bishop said nothing about the suffering and social divisions caused by the policies of Castro's government.

MISPLACED CONCERN. Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold preaches during his visit to Cuba. Griswold took the opportunity to blame the U.S. embargo for Cuba's social and economic problems, while ignoring the country's abysmal human rights record.

Cuba was not the only place raising human rights concerns among the Episcopal leaders. Two resolutions on the Israel/Palestine conflict were also offered in the *Blue Book*. Strangely, however, they seem to offer contradictory approaches to the peace process.

The first resolution, A011, would affirm a two-state solution to the conflict, seek an end to violence, and call for all parties to return to the negotiating table rather than resort to unilateral action. Strangely enough, however, the resolution also demands that Israel withdraw from all its West Bank settlements—which would appear to be a unilateral action. There is no specific reciprocal concession asked of the Palestinian Authority.

The second resolution, A012, is nothing but a list of unilateral actions that the Episcopal Church would have Israel take: removal of the security barrier between predominantly Jewish and Arab areas, return of sovereign control of Gaza's airspace, etc. The only demand which seems even remotely tied to the Palestinians is the resolution's vague call for the "eradication of the sin of anti-Semitism." The practitioners of this sin are not identified. Nor is it explained how this sin, amongst all others, might be "eradicated."

What is remarkable about these resolutions is the complete lack of any recognition of the new situation created after the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections earlier this year. With the Palestinian Authority now headed by a group that refuses to recognize Israel's existence—indeed, that is sworn to Israel's destruction, and that has carried out terrorist attacks towards that end—it is hard to see where Israel will find a negotiating partner.

It is astounding that such a development could go unmentioned in the proposed Episcopal resolutions. They simply repeat the insistence that Israel must negotiate with the Palestinian Authority, as if Hamas were only waiting for a few Israeli concessions in order to de-activate its terrorist bombs. The Executive Council wrapped up its work for the triennium in late February, a month after the elections.

Also jarring is the request in resolution A012 for "assurance that no U.S. tax dollars are used to finance the [Israeli] Occupation [of the West Bank], directly or indirectly." This demand appears ironic in light of the current lobbying by Bishop Griswold and other mainline leaders for continued U.S. funding of the Palestinian Authority, despite its new Hamas leadership. There seems to be a double standard here.

The human rights advocacy of the Episcopal Church remains deeply flawed. As was demonstrated in the 2004 IRD study, *Human Rights Advocacy in the Mainline Protestant Churches (2000-2003)*, there is a pattern of disproportionate and unrelenting focus of criticism on the United States and Israel. If these latest proposed resolutions for the Episcopal General Convention are any indication, the pattern remains, unfortunately, unchanged. ✚



Same-Sex Couples Target Egg Roll

by Mark Tooley

A coalition of homosexual rights groups mobilized “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender” families to appear at this year’s annual White House Easter egg roll, which is a 130-year-old tradition. Though insisting it was not political, the “gay” rights groups asked their supporters to wear rainbow leis on the White House lawn to get publicity.

Participants in the “visibility event” included the pro-homosexuality Reconciling Congregations (United Methodist) and Integrity (Episcopal), and Soulforce, which routinely demonstrates at church conventions and often performs civil disobedience. The Family Pride Coalition, as the chief organizer, insisted that its purposes were not political.

Insisting it was indeed political, I was the designated media critic of the Family Pride mobilization. A piece I wrote in January for *The Weekly Standard* exposed the Family Pride Coalition’s plans, which were to have remained secret until Easter. *The Drudge Report* linked to the article, which led to a question for Scott McClellan at a White House press conference, which led to Associated Press coverage.

Stories about “crashing” the egg roll appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* (“White House Letter: At the Easter Egg Roll Focus on a Family Issue”), *Newsday* (“Egg roll draws gay parents”), *New York Times* (“The Egg Roll (Again!) Becomes a Stage for Controversy”), *San Francisco Chronicle* (“Lesbian and gay families camp out for egg roll tickets”), *Los Angeles Times* (“Gay Families Seek Role in White House Tradition”), and *Washington Post* (“Gay, Lesbian Families to Join American Tradition En Masse”), among others. The Associated Press, Scripps Howard, Cox and United Press International, along with Religion News Service, also chimed in with their own reporting.

A spokesperson for the Family Pride Coalition repeated her talking point that no politics were involved: “Showing up, participating fully in an American tradition, showing Americans that we do exist, that in our minds isn’t a protest.” I repeated my theme that politicizing a children’s event was wrong, especially in the case of the venerated egg roll, which has remained remarkably politics-free for over a century, despite its White House location.

The alternative families were scheduled to start lining up Friday night at the White House gate so as to be sure to get the first round of tickets passed out Saturday morning. Family Pride

organized volunteers to stand in line for supporters who could not be there themselves.

Several days before the egg roll, film crews from local television stations began dropping by my office. Naturally, the crews also sought out the Family Pride spokesperson, some of them filming her with her female companion and their young children. But I did not meet the Family Pride spokesperson until we both appeared outside the make-up room at Fox News, waiting to appear on “Dayside.”

“Hi, I’m Jennifer Chrisler!” she offered, after a brief moment of hesitation by both of us. She was as charming as her broadcast interviews had suggested. We exchanged brief biographic information and Easter plans. She was whisked away to the studio, and I was installed in a separate booth.

“Why are you politicizing the egg roll?!” exclaimed one “Dayside” audience member, to applause. Across the bottom of the screen, Fox helpfully flashed “Gay Egg Roll” and “Crashing the Egg Roll.”

CNN’s *Situation Room* expressed skepticism to Chrisler that her mobilization for the egg roll was completely non-political. “I believe this administration is wrong about how they think about the policies that affect gay and lesbian people and gay and lesbian families in this country,” she responded.

The *Situation Room* followed up this way: “So putting that together with what you’re doing and the fact that you didn’t do it for a Democratic administration, this is not a political statement that you’re making?” Chrisler responded: “No, this is about us being visible for the American people, so that they can see that gay and lesbian parents exist in this country.”

ABC’s nightly news titled its story: “Brokeback Bunny? Gays Vie for Easter Egg Roll.” It briefly quoted me saying the Family Pride

Coalition’s plans to exploit the egg roll were “tasteless.” After featuring a lesbian couple in New York planning to journey to Washington, D.C., the story concluded with footage of the egg roll being racially integrated by the Eisenhowers in the 1950s.

It rained the Monday morning of the egg roll. And some of Chrisler’s mobilized followers complained that even though they had been among the first in line to get tickets, they were not permitted in until after 11 a.m., well past the 9 a.m. appearance of the First Couple. The White House explained that the first two hours were reserved for the children of White House staff and for children from volunteer groups.

In the end, the Family Pride Coalition said it had about 100 alternative families show up in rainbow leis. After the rainy morning at the White House, they attended a “celebration” at Washington’s Foundry United Methodist Church, where the Clintons regularly used to attend.



EGG ROLL CONTROVERSY. The annual White House Egg Roll has remained largely politics-free since its inception. But all that changed this Easter when pro-homosexuality groups chose it as a venue to criticize President Bush’s opposition to same-sex marriage.

Sitting With the President

by Faith McDonnell

A quick telephone call from a number listed only as “202,” a few lines of email, and suddenly I was going to a meeting with the President of the United States! I was among eight Sudan human rights advocates who had been asked to the White House on April 28, 2006, to talk about that nation with President Bush and others in the administration.

The meeting was held in the Roosevelt Room, where the Sudan Peace Act had been signed 3-1/2 years ago. On that occasion, the room was crowded with rows of chairs. Jubilant Sudan advocates, members of Congress, and Southern Sudanese watched as President Bush signed into law the U.S. commitment to use its leverage to stop the horrors that were being inflicted upon South Sudan.

This day, however, the chairs were around a table where we would discuss the ongoing genocide in Darfur in western Sudan. I found my nameplate in front of the chair designated for me. Beside me was a chair that had no name in front of it. Could it be?... Yes! I was seated next to the President of the United States. My friend Simon Deng, a Southern Sudanese who had once been enslaved, was on the President’s other side.

Before President Bush entered, Michael Gerson, his Assistant for Policy and Strategic Planning, assured us of the President’s own deep engagement on Darfur. “We don’t want genocide to have a foothold in the 21st century,” he declared.

Then the President came in and the discussion was in full swing. We talked about humanitarian efforts, the need for a diplomatic solution, and the immediate security problems facing the Darfurian refugees.

President Bush spoke of strengthening the African Union (AU) forces so they could really protect the civilians. “I believe it’s important for the United States to be involved, and the best way to be involved with the AU troops is through NATO,” he

said. “I want the Sudanese government to understand the United States of America is serious about solving this problem.”

When it was my turn to speak, I thanked President Bush for the attention he has given to Sudan. I told him that although IRD had been working for religious freedom and peace in Sudan for ten years, it was only when he came into office that the issue was elevated. I told him that we appreciated his mentioning Sudan in many speeches, as well his actions in signing the Sudan Peace Act and appointing special officials to focus on that beleaguered nation.

Then I warned about the chess game being played by the Islamist government in Khartoum. While all eyes were on Darfur, Khartoum might be planning its next aggressive moves elsewhere. I urged that one way to help the people of Darfur was not to forget the people of South Sudan. I said that a strong South Sudan would be better able to stand beside the Darfurians who were suffering the same kind of genocide. Father Keith Roderick, director of the Washington office of Christian Solidarity International, suggested that the South Sudan president, Salva Kiir Mayardit, be invited to the White House.

Simon Deng explained how amazed he was to find himself—a former slave—meeting the leader of the world’s most powerful nation. President Bush, moved by Simon’s story, responded, “Freedom is a gift from the Almighty.” He concluded that the United States has an obligation to help wherever people are suffering from disease, despair, and genocide.

Years from now, President George W. Bush will be remembered for making extra efforts on behalf of a remote African country with few claims to political or strategic importance, but many claims upon the world’s conscience. Carrying the heavy burden of an America at war, he nonetheless had the heart and the political will to make a difference for Sudan. ✚



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