

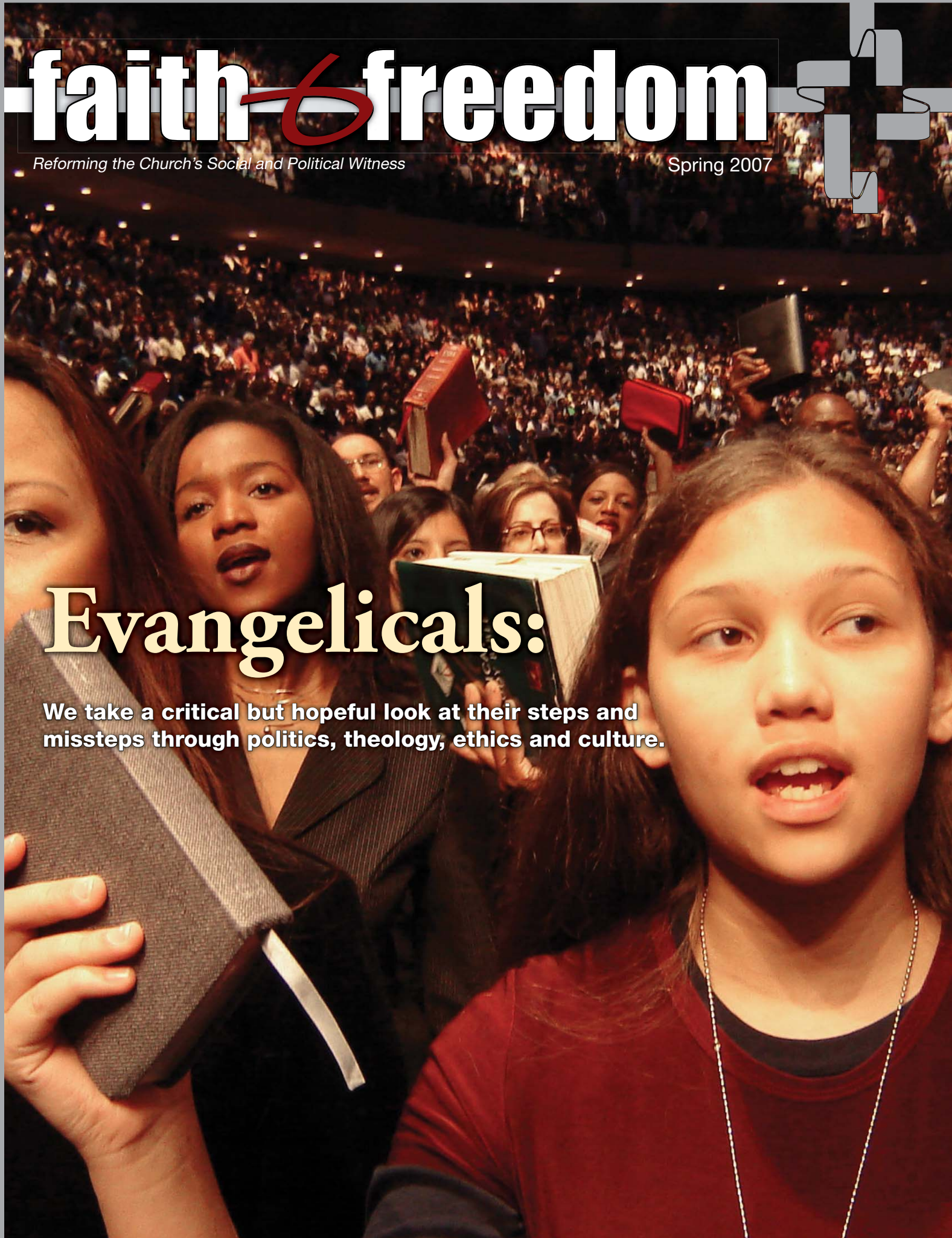
faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Spring 2007

Evangelicals:

We take a critical but hopeful look at their steps and missteps through politics, theology, ethics and culture.





The Institute on Religion & Democracy

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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 teachings, thereby contributing to the renewal of democratic society 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.

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VOLUME 26 NUMBER 1

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WEEKLY POLL

Should Southern Methodist University accept or reject the proposed Bush presidential library?

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A Southern Methodist University minister is attempting to stop Southern Methodist University from accepting the Bush Presidential Library. Despite the fact that Bush is an active member of Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, over 10,000 people





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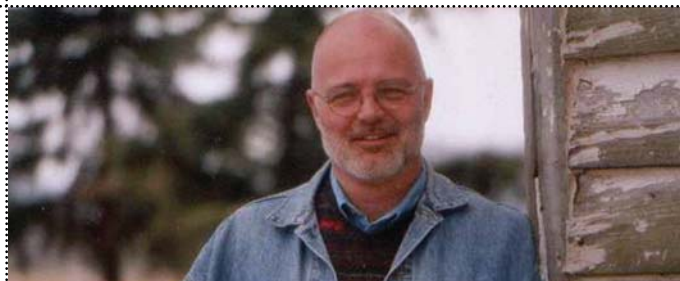
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The Purpose of IRD: One Church

In their book *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus*, Anglican theologian J.I. Packer and United Methodist theologian and IRD board member Thomas Oden write:

Evangelical Christians, in our definition, are those who read the Bible as God's own Word, addressed personally to each of them here and now; and who live out of a personal trust in, and love for, Jesus Christ, as the world's only Lord and Savior. They are people who see themselves as sinners saved by grace through faith for glory; who practice loyal obedience to God; and who are active both in grateful, hopeful communion with the triune God by prayer, and in neighbor-love, with a lively commitment to disciple-making according to the Great Commission.

They note that "within and outside the denominations of the Protestant establishment there has been a major evangelical resurgence since the mid-twentieth century." The IRD, the Association for Church Renewal, and all of the denominational renewal groups with which we work have been profoundly influenced by that resurgence. We all have a stake in evangelicalism.

Packer and Oden point out what we at the IRD know by experience, that there is a theological and spiritual consensus built around Christian orthodoxy that supersedes our institutional differences. We are, as Oden has written elsewhere, "seeking to restore and embody classic Christian truth within and beyond the old divisions."

And while the consensus to which Packer and Oden refer can get us beyond the old divisions, we sinners invariably create new divisions. For example, the division some want to make between morality and compassion.

Take, for example, the comments of Joel Hunter, the Florida megachurch pastor who was the intended president of the Christian Coalition of America. After Hunter and the Christian Coalition board decided it was not in the best interest of the organization for Hunter to be president, Hunter lamented, "I wanted to expand the agenda from only the moral issues, the pro-life, pro-traditional marriage, that kind of thing, to the compassion issues of Christ—poverty and justice, creation care."

Notice the contrast he draws: "only the moral issues" are set over and against "the compassion issues of Christ." This strikes me as an odd, misleading, and false dichotomy.

It is precisely the compassion of Christ that explains why Christians are in the pro-life movement. Can anyone doubt that care for the unborn is compassionate? And Christians have gone beyond political activism to the establishment of pregnancy care centers—typically in the very same poor neighborhoods that are home to abortion clinics. These centers provide a moral, compassionate, life-affirming alternative to abortion.

Regarding marriage, there is a mountain of evidence that indicates that the best way to fight poverty, delinquency, and crime is to encourage traditional marriage.

While there are single parents who are great moms and dads and who raise wonderful children, the statistics are stacked against the children of single-parent families—particularly fatherless families.

In her study, "Experiments in Living: The Fatherless Family," Rebecca O'Neill concluded "the decline of the two-parent, married-couple family has resulted in poverty, ill-health, educational failure, unhappiness, anti-social behaviour, isolation and social exclusion for thousands of women, men and children."

As IRD's Erik Nelson has argued, churches cannot be true to their commitment to compassion, social justice, and the poor without an unwavering commitment to traditional marriage.

On the issue of "creation care," proponents of climate control advocate policies that are guaranteed to withhold economic justice from the world's poorest populations.

The poor need energy for refrigeration so they don't have to eat spoiled food, for heating and cooking so they don't have to burn dried dung, and for transportation to give them access to world markets. If, in the name of climate control, we deny the poor energy, we doom them to sickness and poverty.

Testifying before the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, Christian ethicist E. Calvin Beisner said, "If we want to help the world's poor, we shall do so far better by helping them become wealthy and able to adapt to whatever temperature the future holds than by slowing their economic development, condemning them to additional generations of poverty and its attendant suffering, and depriving them of the wealth they need to triumph over any future catastrophe."

In each case—abortion, marriage, and climate change—the moral and the compassionate merge. "Only the moral issues" are in fact "the compassion issues of Christ."

The evangelical consensus that Packer and Oden have written about has been hard won. Standing together, evangelicals in America are in a position to do great good. It would be a tragedy if false dichotomies and fuzzy thinking about public policy and social witness prevented it. ✚

Jim Tonkovich



James W. Tonowich is the President of the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

International Briefs

Eritrea Continues Crackdown on Christians

Sixty-eight Christians were arrested during the first week of January 2007 in the east African nation of Eritrea, continuing five years of oppression by the government of the predominantly Muslim country.

On January 4, 35 student military conscripts at the national Sawa Military Center were arrested for possessing Bibles. According to the human rights monitor Compass Direct, 250 Bibles were burned and the teenaged conscripts were subjected to “military punishment,” including physical torture.

The following day, officials arrested eight members of Medhane Alem, a renewal movement within the Coptic Orthodox Church, in the northern Eritrean town of Keren. The jailed church members were interrogated to identify other leaders of the movement, which has been outlawed by the Eritrean government.

Also on January 5, 25 individuals in the port city of Assab were apprehended on the basis of their Christian beliefs. The detainees were interrogated at Wi’a Military Camp, where they were pressed to recant their faith. Authorities in Assab indicated that more arrests were expected.

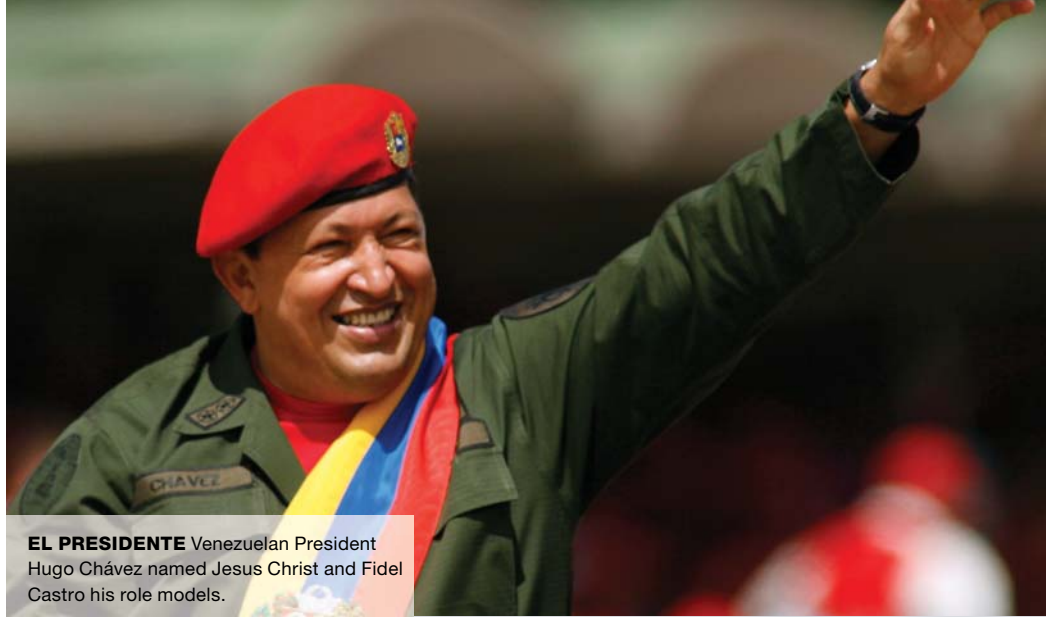
Over 2,000 Christians from both Protestant and Orthodox traditions are currently under arrest in Eritrea. None of the detainees has been officially charged with a crime.

Eritrea was identified as a “country of particular concern” by the U.S. State department in 2006 for its violations of religious liberty. It is the third year in a row Eritrea has received this designation. 📌

Law in England Could Drive Catholic Church Out of Adoption Programs

Roman Catholic adoption agencies in Great Britain will not be exempted from a new law requiring the acceptance

Jorge Silva/Reuters



EL PRESIDENTE Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez named Jesus Christ and Fidel Castro his role models.

Venezuelan President Declares Jesus Christ “the Greatest Socialist in History”

Speaking in his inaugural address on January 10, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez declared his commitment to advancing socialist principles in the South American nation, citing Jesus Christ and Fidel Castro as his role models.

“I swear by my people and my country that will I not rest my arm or my soul as we build a new political system, a new social system, a new economic system,” said Chávez. “I swear by Christ, the greatest socialist in history, I will follow the wonderful mandates of this constitution, even if it costs me my own life and my own peace. Country, socialism or death, I swear it!”

Chávez was recently elected to his third term as president in Venezuela, garnering 63 percent of the votes. He has proposed a constitutional change allowing for “indefinite re-election,” allowing him to run again in 2012.

In 2006, Chávez met with Pope Benedict XVI in Italy. During his comments there, he vouched for his own Christian faith, as well as that of his ally, Cuban communist dictator Fidel Castro. “Our Bolivarian revolution is very Christian,” the Venezuelan strongman told the Pope. “And I have a friend who isn’t Christian, but lately has said he is a Christian in the social aspect: his name is Fidel Castro. I talk to [Castro] a lot about Christ each time we see each other, and he told me recently, ‘Chávez, I’m Christian in the social sense.’” 📌

of same-sex couples as potential parents, despite appeals to Prime Minister Tony Blair by the leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

“[T]here is no place in our society for discrimination,” said Blair in a January 29 statement. “That is why I support the right of gay couples to apply to adopt like any other couple. And that is why there can be no exemption for faith-based adoption agencies offering public funded services from regulation that prevents discrimination.”

Cormac Cardinal Murphy O’Connor expressed disappointment in the decision. In a letter sent to cabinet members prior to Blair’s statement,

Cardinal O’Connor warned of potential ramifications of the new law. “Catholic teaching about the foundations of family life, a teaching shared not only by other Christian churches but also other faiths, means that Catholic adoption agencies would not be able to recruit and consider homosexual couples as potential adoptive parents,” he said.

Cardinal O’Connor was supported by several other religious groups in Great Britain, including the Muslim Council of Britain. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the Church of England primate, also wrote a letter to Prime Minister Blair warning that such a law would put the consciences of Christians at risk. 📌

Indian States Pass Anti-Conversion Laws

The adoption of an anti-conversion law in the northern Himachal Pradesh state has brought criticism from Christian groups in India. The critics complain that the ruling India National Congress, a secular political party, is pandering to a small but vocal minority of Hindu nationalists in the region.

“This bill is an appeasement of radical Hindus at the expense of Christians,” said Sajjan K. George, President of the Global Council of Indian Christians.

Three other Indian states—each ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—have previously adopted anti-conversion legislation.

According to the Himachal Pradesh law, anyone found to be “forcibly converting” another could be imprisoned up to two years or fined as much as 25,000 rupees (\$565 U.S.). Those seeking to convert must give 30 days notice, or face a fine of 1,000 rupees (\$23 U.S.).

A report by the National Commission for Minorities in June 2006 found that Hindu extremists were using the anti-conversion laws in the BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh state to incite violence against Christians.

However, a February 2007 report by the government-funded Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission concluded that claims that Hindu extremists are persecuting Christians in the state are “baseless.”

Church of Norway Considers Disestablishment

In November 2006, the General Synod of the Church of Norway (Lutheran) voted to “radically change” the relationship between the church and the state that has existed in the Scandinavian country for nearly 500 years.

Sixty-three out of 85 synod delegates voted to recommend removing from the Norwegian constitution any mention of a state or national church. A separate act passed by parliament would provide the new foundation for the church, with the

General Synod assuming any ecclesial authority currently residing with the king or the government. The synod’s decision mirrors a similar change made by neighboring Sweden in 2000.

A report to the Norwegian parliament is due in late 2008. Because such a change would require alterations to Norway’s constitution, some officials project 2013 as the earliest possible date for implementation.

“The synod’s decision is historic,” said Jens Petter Johnsen, head of the Church of Norway national council.

“What matters is the relationship between Church and people, not between Church and State. We will do our utmost to strengthen the service of the church and with our people.”

Although 86 percent of Norwegians are members of the Church of Norway, only about three percent attend worship services regularly. The church was established in 1537, when King Christian III endorsed the Lutheran reformation and established the Lutheran-Evangelical Church as the official church in Norway and Denmark.

Ismael Mohamad/UPI



CIVIL WAR Rival Palestinian militant parties have been engaged in hostilities for months. The solution offered by church leaders? They should pursue their grievances against Israel.

Church Leaders in Holy Land Offer to Mediate Fatah-Hamas Conflict

Urging leaders of the Hamas and Fatah parties to pursue their grievances against Israel instead of one another, Christian church officials in Jerusalem have offered to serve as mediators between the warring Palestinian factions in an attempt to bring peace to the war-ravaged region.

“As leaders of the Christian churches in Jerusalem concerned at the present situation in the Palestinian Territories we feel we must voice our anxiety for all our people—Christian and Muslim alike—at the deteriorating relations between Fatah and Hamas leaders and the armed forces,” said church leaders in a January 15 statement. “...Fighting and kidnapping opponents will not bring down the Separation Wall or end the embargo on the Palestinian people.”

Signatories of the statement included Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilous III, Anglican Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, and Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Church leaders called for the removal of arms from the streets, a renewed, unified Palestinian government, and a return to the negotiating table with Israeli officials. “The time has come for an all-out effort to unite our people and so concentrate on working for independence together.”

Church News

ELCA Defrocks Unchaste Minister

By a one-vote margin, a committee of ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) decided to defrock the Rev. Bradley Schmeling of Atlanta for his defiance of the denomination's standards for clergy conduct. Southeastern Synod Bishop Ronald Warren explained that he filed formal charges against Schmeling after the Atlanta pastor "disclosed to me that he is in a sexual relationship with an adult male" and subsequently "declined my requests for his resignations" from his pulpit and the roster of ordained ELCA clergy. Schmeling's partner is himself a former Lutheran minister whom he met at a gathering of gay Lutherans in 2004.

The denomination has a policy that states, "Ordained ministers who are

homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships." The 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly rejected a proposal to allow exceptions to that policy.

The committee's ruling explained that the narrowest majority of jurors believed that the ELCA policy left "no choice" but to determine that as "a practicing homosexual person" Schmeling was "precluded from the ordained ministry of this church." However, the ruling also announced that the committee was "nearly unanimous" in believing that the ELCA's current position was "at least bad policy, and may very well violate the constitution and bylaws of this church." The widely-watched ruling concluded by calling on denominational leaders "to remove the language that

specifically precludes practicing homosexuals from service as ordained ministers of this church."

The clergy jury's denunciation of the ELCA's historic standards was enthusiastically applauded in public statements from major secular gay rights groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce. Lutherans Concerned/North America, a major pro-homosexuality caucus in the ELCA, released statements comparing the trial of Schmeling to that of Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate. Lutherans Concerned also praised the jury for its "courageous and unprecedented" criticism of the standards it was charged with enforcing. ☐

"Moderate" Baptists Launch New Coalition

On January 9, leaders from a variety of North American Baptist groups and denominations with a total of 20 million members unveiled a major project for cooperative work. The public announcement at the Carter Center in Atlanta prominently included former Presidents Clinton and Carter, the latter of whom explained that this "Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant" would "emphasize the common commitments that bind us together rather than...the divisive issues that separate us." Coalition leaders expect to attract 20,000 church leaders to their first convocation in January 2008. This event will focus on social concerns related to peace, poverty, and the environment.

Organizers of this effort have described it as an attempt to organize an effective counterweight to the more conservative Baptists "who have the microphone," in order to change the public perception of Baptists. The announcement conspicuously included no officials of the 16-million-member, conservative Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest Protestant denomination. Organizers have said that individual Southern Baptists are welcome to attend the 2008 meeting. ☐

Episcopal Church Fractures

At their 2003 General Convention, Episcopalians made worldwide headlines by electing a homosexually active bishop and recognizing same-sex union services as "within the bounds of our common life."

According to a recent survey of congregations by the denomination's own research office, 21 percent of Episcopal parishes have experienced a "very serious conflict" over the actions of the 2003 General Convention. This congregational strife has yet to be resolved in two-thirds of these cases. Another 27 percent of parishes reported "moderate conflict" over these issues. Nationally, the Episcopal Church recently reported that its rate of annual membership decline in 2005 had accelerated to 1.9 percent, nearly five times the 2002 decline.

Scores of congregations have now risked costly legal battles by deciding to leave the Episcopal Church to go under the jurisdiction of non-U.S. Anglican primates. In the Diocese of Virginia alone, the combined average Sunday attendance of the churches pursuing this route is larger than that of forty of the denomination's U.S. dioceses, including the former diocese of Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. In addition, seven Episcopal dioceses have requested to be put under the oversight of a primate more orthodox than Jefferts Schori. ☐

Courtesy ENS



CONTINUED DECLINE The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, the new Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, faces a daunting challenge as membership in the church continues its precipitous decline.

Presbyterian Publishing Corporation Criticizes Own Book

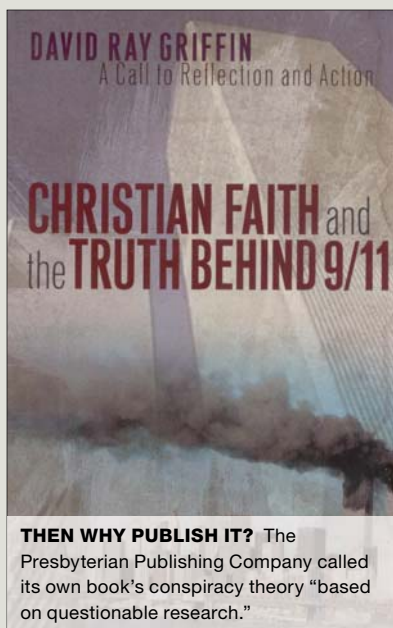
A controversial 9/11 conspiracy book has come under criticism from an unexpected quarter: the board of directors of the book's publisher. A November press release from the official Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC) announced that PPC directors had "reviewed the decision to publish David Ray Griffin's *Christian Faith and the Truth behind 9/11*" and decided that the book "is not up to [our] editorial standards and not representative of the PPC publishing program." The directors

concluded that Griffin's "conspiracy theory is spurious and based on questionable research."

The book, released last summer by one of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) publisher's imprints, provoked a flurry of outrage. Griffin, a Disciples of Christ minister and retired professor at United Methodism's Claremont School of Theology in California, charged that the Bush administration had orchestrated the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He also held the U.S. government responsible for more deaths than Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia.

Even *Presbyterians Today*, the official PCUSA magazine, distanced itself from the book by soliciting and publishing a critical review by IRD Vice President Alan Wisdom. Now the PPC directors themselves have followed suit.

Nevertheless, PPC has not stopped advertising or distributing the book. Its press release featured praise of "Griffin's theological reflections" as "helpful and timely." Those reflections include the assertion that the United States is "the chief embodiment of demonic power," a rejection of God's sovereignty and omnipotence, and chastisement of "some New Testament authors" for stressing Christ's death and bodily resurrection, the latter of which Griffin denies. ☒



Outrageous Quotes

"The Sunday after [the Episcopal Church] General Convention I returned to my home parish for Gay Pride Sunday and participated in a Disco Mass for which gays and lesbians turned out in force. The opening hymn was a beautiful jazz rendition of 'Over the Rainbow.' Musical offerings came from gay men in sequined tank tops and from the Director of Music who was ushered into the service singing a disco number complete with go-go girls. The queen of St. Mark's appeared in full drag to deliver the homily and the closing hymn was, Sister Sledge's 'We Are Family.'"

Nell Braxton Gibson, Coordinator of the Episcopal Urban Caucus, describing a "Disco Mass" at her home congregation in New York City.

"Before the tsunami, many Buddhists thought that Christians were trying to convert the Buddhists by our social service. But our tsunami relief work has started removing that fear."

The Rev. Lesley Weerasinghe, Methodist pastor in the southern port city of Galle, Sri Lanka, where more than 4,000 people perished during the tsunami of December 2004

AME Pastor Calls on African Americans to Join the Fight Against Abortion

A prominent pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church delivered a passionate denunciation of the "murderous and bloody business" of abortion as part of the annual "March for Life" protest of the 1973 Supreme Court decisions that established abortion as a constitutional right.

The Rev. Luke Robinson told the estimated crowd of 200,000 demonstrators in Washington that abortion was inflicting "genocide" on the African American community. He pointed out that in the thirty years since *Roe v. Wade*, abortion had killed over three times as many African Americans as the combined total of such major killers as AIDS, heart attacks, and strokes.

"If it had not been for abortion," Robinson speculated, "we [blacks] would still be the #1 minority in this country." Noting that "there would be outrage in this country" if "five African American babies were killed in their mothers' wombs by the Ku Klux Klan," he asked "where is the outcry" over the more than 500,000 African American babies who died at the hands of abortionists last year.

In light of such statistics, Robinson decried the assertion by some prominent black leaders that abortion was an "irrelevant" issue for their community. The general inaction of black churches against abortion caused him to wonder aloud if they had been "bought out and silenced by a billion-dollar industry." Because of how abortion "is destroying the African American community," he repeatedly declared that "African Americans must come on board and fight for life."

According to the Rev. Johnny Hunter, president of the African-American pro-life group LEARN, Robinson's 2.5 million-member, predominantly black denomination has recently adopted a pro-life position. ☒



Rick Warren's Middle East Misadventure

by Mark D. Tooley

Last November, Syria's state-controlled media boasted that California megachurch pastor Rick Warren, during a visit in Damascus, had endorsed the Syrian perspective on the Middle East. Not only that, but Warren had also reportedly promised to carry that state sponsor of terrorism's message back to the United States.

Warren, pastor of the 30,000-member Saddleback Church and author of the best-selling *The Purpose-Driven*

Life, ignited great controversy with his visit to Syria. This result could have been predicted by anyone familiar with the propaganda machinery of such regimes. But it apparently took Warren by surprise. He subsequently insisted that his statements

had been misconstrued by the Syrian media.

The Syrian newspaper *Umar Jaftali*, which like all Syrian media is manipulated by the Baathist dictatorship, editorialized on November 14:

Pastor Rick Warren, who yesterday met with [Syrian] President Al-Assad and Foreign Minister

Al-Mu'allim, said: "Washington is wrong not to hold dialogue with Syria, which wants peace. I call on the Americans to visit Syria and meet its beautiful people. I will tell the Americans that their idea about Syria does not reflect the truth." This is what the American clergyman said after seeing the facts on the ground. It was not in his interest not to say the truth about what he himself and the accompanying Protestant delegation saw and felt.

The supposed quote from Warren read like a news release from Assad's propaganda ministry.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) provided four reports on the Warren visit. According to SANA, Warren's "American delegation stressed that the American administration is mistaken not to hold dialogue with Syria." Even more egregiously, "Pastor Warren hailed the religious coexistence, tolerance and stability that the Syrian society is enjoying due to the wise leadership of President al-Assad, asserting that he will convey the true image about Syria to the American people." Apparently, Warren gave the Syrian dictator a "memorial drawing" to "thank the Syrian people for their ... efforts exerted for maintaining peace and harmony."

Needless to say, there was no mention of Syria's one-party police state, its political prisoners, its torture chambers, its support for Hezbollah terrorism in Lebanon, and its continued devotion to the destruction of Israel. If these topics were broached by the Warren delegation, SANA did not mention it.

Another SANA report told of Warren's visit with

The supposed quote from Warren read like a news release from Assad's propaganda ministry.

OOOPS (ABOVE) Pastor Rick Warren's visit to Syria resulted in a minor international tempest as Syrian propagandists turned his words to their advantage. But Warren made it worse when he became defensive about his statements. (Rob DeLorenzo/ZUMA Press)

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallim, with whom he “reviewed Syrian-American relations.” Apparently Warren afterwards gave SANA a written statement in which he told SANA what it wanted to hear: “Syria wants peace, and Muslims and Christians live in this country jointly and peacefully since more than a thousand years, and this is not new for Syria.” The California pastor commended Syria as an example for other nations to follow.

Warren assured SANA that, in SANA’s words, he would “tell the Americans that the ideas which had been shaped about [Syria] didn’t reflect the truth and they have to come to Syria and see by themselves and realize her nice people and visit her wonderful and historical ruins.”

Apparently making the grand circuit of Damascus, Warren also met with Syria’s Islamic Grand Mufti. Warren told the Grand Mufti, in SANA’s words, that there is “no peace in the region without Syria, noting that 80 percent of the American people rejected what the U.S. administration is doing in Iraq and considered the U.S. policy in the Mideast as wrong.” Warren went on to share his “admiration” for Syria and its “co-existence” between Christians and Muslims.

The Grand Mufti urged Warren to share with the American people the “real” story about Syria, whose image has been “distorted” by the Bush administration. Reportedly, at least according to SANA, Warren obligingly promised to do just that.

In contrast to the lovefest between Warren and Syrian officials reported by SANA, human rights organizations portray a different “real story” about Syria. This story tells of a nation where only the ruling Baathist Party and its allies are permitted to win elections, where all news media are owned or controlled by the government, where independent labor unions are prohibited, where universities must proclaim Baathist Party policies, where clerics are appointed by the government, where the president by law must be Muslim, and

where women’s limited rights are governed by Islamic *shari’a* law, even though the government is ostensibly secular.

Ten percent of Syria’s population is Christian, having diminished greatly in recent decades. Compared to Saudi Arabia, where conversion away from Islam is punishable by death, Syria is tolerant. But Syria’s constitution stipulates that Islam is the “main source for legislation.” Christians cannot preach to non-Christians, and churches, like mosques, are tightly regulated by the government. No construction of a new Christian school has been permitted in 40 years, and all schools by law must have Muslim principals.

In an official statement released after

Warren made no mention of Syria being on the official U.S. list of terrorist nations, nor of Syria’s support of the Hezbollah terrorist group, one of Israel’s most deadly enemies.

his Syrian visit, Warren defended his actions. He wrote that both Christianity and Judaism are legal in Syria. The Syrian government provides free electricity and water to all churches and allows Christians to create their own civil law instead of having to follow Muslim law, he added.

“The Syrian government has long had a bad reputation in America, but if one considers a positive action like welcoming in thousands of Christian refugees from Iraq, or the protection of freedom to worship for Christians and Jews in Syria, it should not be ignored,” Warren wrote. Syria is more tolerant about religion than places like Cuba and Iraq and other nations cited in the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom report, he asserted.

Warren insisted that his statements should not be seen as overall approval of the Syrian government. “Syria needs many reforms, but in terms of religious freedom, they are ahead of places like Burma, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, and many others.” In his press release, Warren made no mention of Syria being on the official U.S. list of terrorist nations, nor of Syria’s support of the Hezbollah terrorist group, one

of Israel’s most deadly enemies.

But Warren emphasized that the United States would be mistaken “not to talk to nations considered hostile.” Isolation and silence, he wrote, have never solved conflicts. This spring, Warren had been scheduled to visit North Korea at the invitation of its despotic Communist regime. But that trip has now been rescheduled for later in 2007. It is reasonable to assume that, unless Warren alters his approach, the North Korean state-controlled media will issue self-congratulatory reports about Warren’s visit there that are remarkably similar to the coverage that came out of the Syria visit.

It is sad story, repeated often. Celebrity U.S. preachers, often otherwise sensible and orthodox in their faith, visit despotic regimes and naïvely curry favor with police state thugs. The great evangelist

Billy Graham infamously made careless statements during his own visits to the old Soviet Union and North Korea that the state-controlled communist media easily exploited. Nobly intentioned preachers often believe that their friendly ties with dictatorships will facilitate greater preaching access to the oppressed populations. But the end result more usually is a propaganda bonanza for the tyrants, and a population that is left to feel forgotten by the outside world.

Wanting to preach the Good News to captive populations is admirable, of course. But making public excuses for the oppressive dictatorships in the process is a high and probably unnecessary price to pay. American preachers need to rethink how they can reach imprisoned peoples without unintentionally strengthening the prison masters. ■



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What are Evangelicals Doing About Darfur?

by Faith F.H. McDonnell

It Depends on Which Evangelicals You Mean

In both Darfur and Southern Sudan, there were very different responses by different groups of evangelicals.

What are evangelicals doing about Darfur? Open up a newspaper and see a full-page ad sponsored by “Evangelicals for Darfur.” Watch the same ad roll by on the side of a bus. High-profile evangelicals from Bishop Harry Jackson, pastor of Hope Christian Church, to Dr. Richard Land, President of the Southern Baptist Convention Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, have joined with

other Darfur advocates to press President Bush to “do the right thing in leading the world to bring an end to the genocide.” Sponsored by Sojourners in partnership with the Save Darfur Coalition,

Evangelicals for Darfur is a media, web, and grassroots advocacy campaign created for this purpose.

But other evangelicals are doing something about Darfur as well. In the fall of 2004, the leadership of the Sudan Council of Churches USA organized a trip to bring aid to Darfurian refugees in Chad. The Southern

Sudanese felt convicted by God to reach out to their former persecutors—Darfurians had comprised part of the Sudanese government forces that waged war against Southern Sudan. Now Southern Sudanese Christians have built relationships with the Darfurian leaders. Joined by Americans who believe in their vision for reconciliation, the Southern Sudanese mercy mission to Chad is now part of a larger organization, Sudan Sunrise.

Still other evangelicals are supporting Darfurian refugees who fled to the Nuba Mountains. Deborah Martin, an American consultant on Sudanese languages and cultures, found almost 2,000 Darfurian refugees in Nuba in August 2006. Men, women, and children had walked over 600 miles because the former governor of the Nuba Mountains, Commander Abdalaziz Adam Alhilu, is a Darfurian from the Zaghawa tribe. The Darfurians found shelter in a compound of plastic UN-supplied tents. But the impoverished Nuba people had little else to share. Martin began the Darfurians in Nuba Relief Campaign, a coalition including a number of denominations and organizations. The campaign is working with the indigenous Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development Organization to provide blankets, cooking pots, medicines, and other necessities for the Darfurians.

Some observers, including Allen Hertzke in “The Shame of Darfur,” an article in the October 2005 *First Things*, reproach evangelicals for being “fragmented in their response to Darfur.” His words probably motivated some conservatives to join the Evangelicals for

REFUGEES (ABOVE) State-supported militias have driven refugees far from home—to other parts of Darfur, to neighboring Chad, and even to Southern Sudan, where previous victims of Khartoum’s violence give these new refugees shelter. (Jonah Fisher/AFP)

COMFORT (RIGHT) A young Darfurian refugee in the Nuba Mountains receives his blanket from the Darfurians in Nuba Relief Campaign. (Kenneth Grimm)

Darfur campaign. Hertzke surmised that efforts against genocide in Southern Sudan were not fragmented, and were therefore more successful in influencing the U.S. government. But in reality, even in that earlier conflict there were very different responses by different groups of evangelicals.

Peace-and-Justice Progressives and Peace-and-Justice Conservatives

In 2001 *Sojourners* magazine commented, “Religious conservatives have made the most noise about Sudan without much nuance, while peace-and-justice progressives have provided nuance without as much noise.” *Sojourners* itself did not make much noise about Southern Sudan. From January 1994 until today, the magazine contained some 45 references—mostly brief, objective news about the war in Southern Sudan and

the actions of the religious conservatives. The most thorough discussion of the Southern genocide in those twelve years of the publication was “Hope for Sudan,” a commentary in the March/April 2003 issue written by *Sojourners* circulation intern Jeremiah Robinson. There were no *Sojourners*-sponsored campaigns for Southern Sudan similar to the campaign for Darfur today. The vaunted “nuance” in *Sojourners*’ approach was a reluctance to acknowledge the religious element in the war—the fact that the conflict involved an Islamist government in Khartoum trying to force *shari’a* on the Christians and animists of Southern Sudan.

Then there was the noisy, “nuance-free” Sudan Coalition. IRD was a founding member of this coalition which conducted numerous campaigns, including a student campaign to send emails

to Congress, a campaign against the slave raids conducted by Khartoum-allied militias, and a divestment campaign against companies doing oil business with Khartoum. IRD also sponsored a seven-day prayer vigil for Sudan outside the U.S. State Department. In all of these actions, evangelical “conservatives” were joined by both liberal and conservative Jewish organizations. To people of both faiths, liberating Sudanese from slavery, stopping religious persecution, and ending aerial bombardment and ethnic cleansing seemed critical peace and justice matters.

Curiously, the peace-and-justice progressives who favored nuance over noise when 2.5 million black African Christians, moderate Muslims, and practitioners of traditional religions were being slaughtered by Khartoum choose to make noise today. From 2004 until the February 2007 issue, there are some 380 results for “Darfur” in *Sojourners* magazine archives. Many of these references are direct appeals to readers to become involved or to the U.S. government to “do more.” *Sojourners* has held demonstrations at the Sudanese Embassy and encouraged divestment campaigns, but the major portion of its noise is directed at the President of the United States. It sees Darfur’s salvation in the deployment of a strong U.N. peacekeeping force and multilateral economic sanctions against Sudan. And it sees any nuance on the part of the United States government as mere lack of political will to save Darfur.

Nuance Gives Way to Noise

“Without you, Mr. President, Darfur doesn’t have a prayer,” begs the Evangelicals for Darfur ad. The text accompanies a powerful photo of the outstretched hands of a Darfurian refugee. The supplication is all the more poignant because one of these hands is cruelly mutilated—half gone.

The Evangelicals for Darfur website describes itself as a campaign to “call for an end to the senseless suffering in Darfur.” The campaign “recognize[s] the special impact evangelical Christians—from across the political spectrum—can have



on this crisis.” The list of initial endorsers includes several prominent evangelicals who were mostly absent from the campaign for Southern Sudan: Rob Bell of Mars Hill Bible Church, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church, Jim Wallis of Sojourners, speaker Tony Campolo, and authors Brian McLaren and Lauren Winner. But it also includes leaders such as Land; Richard Cizik, the National Association of Evangelicals’ Vice President for Governmental Affairs; and Gloria E. White-Hammond, pastor, pediatrician, and founder of “My Sister’s Keeper.” All of these played a vital role in the fight for Southern Sudan.

But it does not appear that these latter leaders had input into the campaign website. The death of 2.5 million in Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, and other marginalized areas is never mentioned. And some critical facts about the Darfur genocide are not easily accessible.

First, nowhere in the home page/letter to President Bush, nor in the pages entitled “tell a friend,” “further action,” or “about us,” do Evangelicals for Darfur indicate that Darfur is a region of western Sudan. Only the pages entitled “resources” and “press page” mention “Sudan.” Yet the genocide in Darfur cannot be separated from the rest of Sudan.

Second, genocide references appear in the passive voice. For example: “Over 400,000 people have been killed. 2.5 million displaced. Countless more raped, maimed, and tortured.” A few references are made to *janjaweed*, but it takes digging into links to other websites to find out that the perpetrator of the genocide

is the Sudanese government, and that the *janjaweed* are its proxy militias. Those facts may seem obvious to persons familiar with Sudan, but neglecting to state who is doing the killing creates confusion. At a 2005 rally in Washington, DC, some audience members assumed that it was the United States bombing Darfur. Of course dozens of protestors with signs that linked President Bush to genocide in Darfur did not help clarify the situation.

The focusing of blame upon the Bush administration seems perverse—and possibly partisan. No other government in the world has offered more money and more military support for a humanitarian intervention force in Darfur. But that

truth is relevant, but it does show that the horrendous suffering in Darfur is not “senseless.” Just as the genocide of black African Christians in Southern Sudan made sense in light of Khartoum’s agenda, so also does the genocide of the black African Muslims of Darfur. The Sudanese regime has never backed away from the goal of an Arab-Islamist Sudan.

Unexpected Repercussions

In January 2005, the Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and the Government of Sudan signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended decades of war in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. But

before the Southern Sudanese could rejoice that they had some semblance of peace after more than forty years of war, the

Progressive evangelicals rarely mention that an Islamic government is waging a genocidal war against Muslims. They may not believe it is relevant, but it does show that the horrendous suffering in Darfur is not “senseless.”

force has been blocked by Khartoum’s refusal to allow it, coupled with the inaction of other UN Security Council members in the face of pressure from Islamic and anti-U.S. nations eager to protect Khartoum.

Finally, progressive evangelicals rarely mention that what’s happening in Darfur is an Islamic government waging a genocidal war against fellow Muslims. They may not believe this

Islamists in Khartoum made their next move—genocide in Darfur.

Just at the moment when the newly-formed Southern Sudanese government had the opportunity to recover from devastation and build a new democracy that would ensure religious freedom, peace, and justice for all, Khartoum’s genocide against Darfur has ensured that attention and financial support would be drawn away from the South. It has also given

WELCOME Darfur refugees have fled over 600 miles to the Nuba mountains, where they have been embraced as fellow victims of the Sudanese genocide. (Amin Zakaria Ismail)





CONFUSED PRIORITIES (LEFT) Some demonstrators seem more interested in using the Darfur issue for their own domestic politics. (Faith McDonnell/IRD)


STANDING TOGETHER (ABOVE) Leaders of the Sudan Council of Churches USA: the Rev. Michael Yemba, the Rev. Abraham Nhial, and the Rev. Daniel Deng Kuot at the IRD co-sponsored "Sudanese Standing Together" dinner, April 2006. (Faith McDonnell/IRD)

Khartoum time to stall and renege over implementation of the CPA.

But perhaps the Sudanese regime has overplayed its hand after all. It probably did not expect such a massive, sustained show of solidarity with the black African Darfurians for whom it had no regard. As with the campaign to end the war in Southern Sudan, activists are determined to see an end to the genocide.

Neither did Khartoum expect to see a blossoming of the relationship between Southern Sudanese Christians and Darfurians, nor between Darfurians and the Nuba. Sudan Sunrise Director Tom Prichard says the action of the Southern Sudanese not only "sparked a reconciliation movement between Sudanese Christians and Muslims, but it has inspired an equally heroic response among some

Sudanese Muslims who are boldly reaching out to Southerners, despite criticism." And making the Nuba Mountains a place of refuge for the Darfurians is not just a way to relieve the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, but also to support the Government of South Sudan in bringing peace, justice, and religious freedom to all. Reconciliation between peoples that Khartoum has worked so hard to divide is that regime's worst nightmare.

Evangelicals of all kinds have a role to play in bringing peace and justice to Sudan. It took over eight years of hard work and noisy activism to bring an end to the jihad in Southern Sudan. But what evangelicals are doing about Darfur today, in all of its fragmentation, may ensure that ending the genocide in Darfur does not take that long. 

Helping Darfurian Refugees in the Nuba Mountains

In the Nuba Mountains

The Darfurians in Nuba Relief Campaign has an ongoing fund to provide relief to the Darfurians in the Nuba Mountains. Its first collection, of over \$27,000, was used to purchase blankets and distribute them to 1123 Darfurian children in the Nuba Mountains. Now they are working to raise funds for blankets for adults, and for mosquito nets, cooking pots and utensils, and needed medicines.

To assist the Darfurians in the Nuba Mountains, you may wish to send a check to St. Bartholomew's Episcopal/Anglican Church, Darfurians in Nuba Relief Campaign, 4800 Belmont Park Terrace, Nashville, TN 37215. Include the identifying line "Darfurians in Nuba Relief Campaign" in the memo section of the check. Contact Faith McDonnell at IRD for more information.

In Chad

Sudan Sunrise continues to build relationships with the Darfurian refugees in Chad. Through ongoing trips and through the presence of Sudanese Episcopal priest Peter Adum Deng, Sudan Sunrise is working to heal North/South and Muslim/Christian relationships, as well as to provide for the practical needs of thousands of Darfurians.

To assist Sudan Sunrise, you may wish to send a check to Sudan Sunrise, 8643 Hauser Court, Suite 240, Lenexa, KS 66215. You can contact Sudan Sunrise through its website, www.sudansunrise.org.



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An Old Kind of Jesus

Brian McLaren's thesis to the contrary, there's nothing secret or new about the Jesus he says he finds in the gospels—but it is revealing of trends within evangelicalism today.

by Ralph A. Webb

The rapid rise of Brian McLaren has been remarkable. He gained visibility as a speaker at conferences on Christianity and postmodernism in the 1990s. But it is only within this decade that he became arguably the most well-known proponent of the “emerging church” movement. Most indicative of his growing fame was *Time* magazine’s naming him one of the 25 most influential evangelicals in early

2005. He has lately extended his influence into mainline Protestantism.

McLaren quickly became a bestselling author. His third book, *A New Kind of Christian* (2001), generated the buzz that made him both

popular and, to many, controversial. That book and its sequels *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (2003) and *The Last Word and the Word after That* (2005) together form a trilogy that presents McLaren’s worldview in a series of fictional dialogues. He also distilled his

thought in the nonfiction work *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004) and, most recently, in *The Secret Message of Jesus* (2006).

The Secret Message of Jesus is designed to appeal to Americans’ current fascination with spiritual “secrets”—particularly evident in the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code*. The promotional materials give McLaren credit for supposedly “clear[ing] away the dust of two thousand years of the Christian religion.” He has “uncover[ed] the truth that could change everything,” to quote the book’s subtitle. Other questionable superlatives have been applied to McLaren; Episcopal author Phyllis Tickle predicted a few years ago that his thought will have a revolutionary impact comparable to Luther’s 95 theses.

McLaren announces in the introduction his intention to write “for a broad, nonscholarly, and in many cases nonreligious audience.” This audience is composed of both Christians and spiritual seekers who are “unsatisfied” with the “conventional” picture of Jesus presented by orthodox Christianity. These individuals—and McLaren includes himself among them—“sense [a] possibility regarding Jesus...[an] unshakeable intuition that both he and his message are better than anything they’ve heard or understood or figured out so far.”

The author sees this message as hidden primarily in the parables of Jesus and crystallized in the imagery of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is here now, but also not yet in its final form. Christians must,

McLaren holds that Christians have been overly concerned with individual salvation and repeatedly have missed the real point of building the kingdom.

SECRETS? (ABOVE) Brian McLaren’s bestselling books have made him both popular and controversial. Many, however, call into question his contention that he has uncovered anything new or secret in his books. (www.brianmclaren.net)

THE McLAREN CODE Clever marketing for McLaren's book plays on the ideas of secrecy and coverup which made Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* such a success. A flap with the title and subtitle of the book hides the majority of the hardback edition's cover illustration of Jesus Christ. (W Publishing Group)

according to McLaren, work to build the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

This message is neither new nor "secret." It has been present, in greater or lesser degrees, throughout Church history. It has practical social justice components (e.g., helping the poor, defending the unjustly accused, caring for the sick and the elderly, living a simple lifestyle) that have been a part of Christian witness since the time of the apostles. McLaren, however, takes two positions that are comparatively recent in Church history. First, he identifies this message as the fundamental concern of Christianity. Second, he conceives of social witness largely in terms of a progressive political agenda.

Criticizing the Church

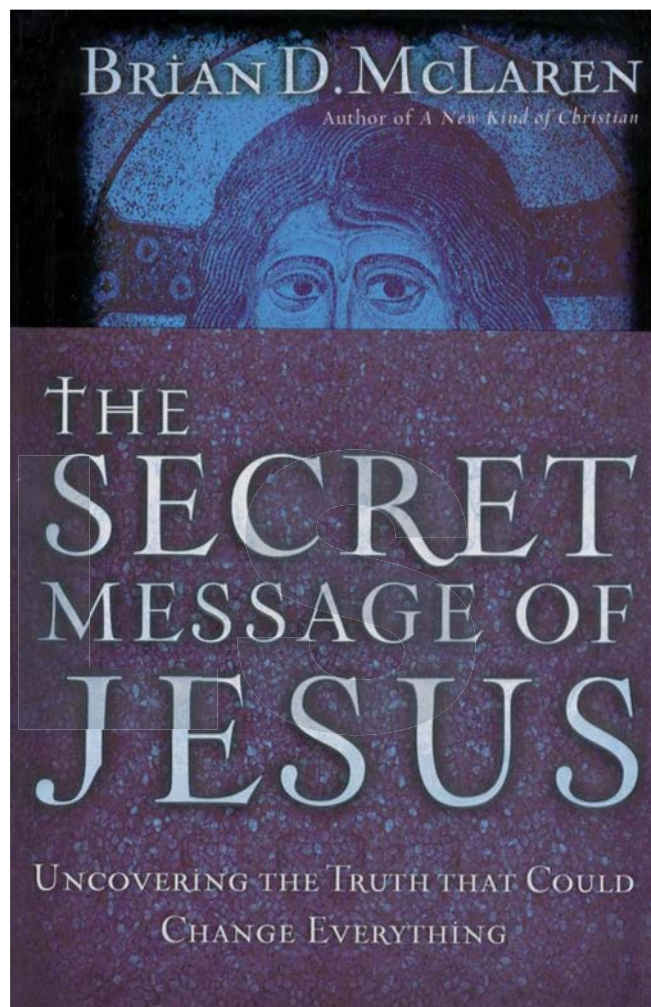
McLaren holds that Christians have been overly concerned with individual salvation and repeatedly have missed the real point of building the kingdom. He does not deny the need for conversion, nor does he avoid using terms like sin and repentance. Still, his understanding of humanity's sinfulness seems to be that we are less rebellious against God than misguided. As an analogy, he portrays human beings as naïve basketball players mistakenly intent on shooting the ball into the wrong hoop. McLaren never explores more profoundly the seriousness of sin. With his more "generous" sense of humanity's nature, McLaren seems closer to progressive biblical scholar Marcus Borg than to his stated hero, the orthodox scholar and bishop N.T. Wright.

Just as troubling is the considerable blame that McLaren places on the

Christian Church for forgetting, misunderstanding, or neglecting Jesus' message of the kingdom. His charges are extensive: the Church has communicated the wrong message about Jesus; it has not been inclusive enough; it has kept Christians from caring about social justice and consequently is responsible for "preserv[ing] the unjust status quo." And because Christianity has been "the largest, richest, and most powerful religion in the world," the Church's actions have allegedly had a negative impact on the whole world.

The Church's perceived failures lead McLaren to "feel sorry for Jesus, sorry for the way we've dumbed down, domesticated, regimented, or even ruined what he started." He believes that Jesus intended to start not a religion, but a revolution that affects every sphere of life—and Christians have been slow to understand. "[Jesus] tried and tried to tell us in word and deed, in sign and wonder, in metaphor and parable, but we were so dull," McLaren laments. Given such words, readers might be forgiven for assuming that the author takes a "more-intelligent-than-thou" view of himself or modern Christians in comparison with earlier generations of believers. To his credit, however, he disavows this attitude.

Many of McLaren's reasons for



why the Church has opposed, ignored, or missed Jesus' "secret message" over the centuries predictably resemble the charges lodged by progressive critics. Anti-Semitism, comfort with the power gained from civil religion, and pride are just some of the vices attributed to the Church as a whole. But McLaren also believes that the Church simply could not have fully understood Jesus' "secret message" until it had access to texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and modern biblical scholarship. The inescapable conclusion here is that Christians today know more about Jesus and his mission than Christians of the past.

Even though McLaren clearly does not *hate* the Church, his charges are overly broad. In the past, reform movements in all segments of Christianity looked back to the apostles and the Church Fathers for the bases of their reform. Is it realistic to believe, as

McLaren does, that Christians today understand Jesus' message better than those who first proclaimed it?

It is not startling that the Church sadly has fallen into scandal at different times over the centuries. But despite these human failings, Christians generally have been encouraged by the faithfulness of God to the Church throughout the centuries. They have not "fe[lt] sorry for Jesus" or believed that God's plan had been thwarted.

While McLaren desires to encourage the formation of communities dedicated to living out Jesus' "secret message," he ironically ends up advocating a highly individualistic

faith. Just as many evangelicals have pitted "religion" against a "relationship" with Christ, or so-called "Churchianity" against Christianity,

McLaren pits the Church against Jesus' "secret message."

Furthermore, given McLaren's opposition to consumerism, it is curious that he describes the Church as a product for human customers. The Church in his view has committed the cardinal sin of being "so boring that people just walked away." McLaren apparently considers both church attendance and the sacraments as optional extras for his new Christian communities. If heeded, this advice may well produce a cafeteria-style faith in which people self-select their companions and practices along their faith journeys.

A Progressive Social Witness

McLaren's belief that building the kingdom of God on earth constitutes the *primary* mission for Christians not surprisingly points him in a progressive direction theologically. He constantly uses progressive language: he claims that Jesus was a "revolutionary," talks repeatedly of how Jesus' message opposes

"the domination system" and "power," and promotes "inclusion" as a hallmark of the kingdom. He also proposes questionable metaphors such as the "dream of God" and "revolution of God" as alternatives to the "kingdom of God."

This liberal slant naturally extends to social witness issues. McLaren urges his readers to stand prophetically against the "-isms" (e.g., racism, sexism, consumerism, materialism) that oppose God's kingdom. When they do so, they work toward a day when "this world will become a place God is at home in, a place God takes pride and pleasure in, a place where God's dreams come true."

McLaren's evangelical vision is fundamentally a progressive one increasingly claimed by those who consider themselves "centrists" or others who count themselves among the evangelical left.

Anglican readers no doubt will discern here the similarities to language used by Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori.

McLaren gives an entire chapter to only one social witness issue, peacemaking. Here, he straddles the line between mild commendation of Christian "just war theory" as an imperfect option and promotion of a near-pacifist position of "active peacemaking." Since he does want some Christians to work in the military in order to spread the kingdom there, he is not a strict pacifist. But he ultimately favors a politically liberal solution marked by a continual decrease in military funding.

This same kind of tightrope walking is evident in comments on other social witness issues. When asked once to speak on same-sex marriage, McLaren declined, stating that he did not want to offend either orthodox or progressive Christians. Elsewhere, he has commented that he expects that gay marriage will not be a controversy in the churches in a

few decades. This expectation may—although it does not definitively—match the sexual revisionists' assumption that they are on "the winning side of history."

Reflecting and Influencing American Evangelicalism

McLaren's evangelical vision, then, is fundamentally a progressive one increasingly claimed by those who consider themselves "centrists" or others who count themselves among the evangelical left. Sometimes the leftward bent is limited to political action, but it often profoundly influences theology (or vice versa).

McLaren retains the influence of

an evangelical past.

In some ways, he could be considered a typical evangelical of the late 20th and early 21st century. His critiques of the Church are reminiscent of many evangelicals' distrust

of the Church, from the Jesus movement to the present. The communities that he espouses owe much to the small group movement popular within American evangelicalism since the 1980s. And the individualistic implications of his approach are very evangelical.

McLaren's vision ultimately is one of a Christian faith that combines some evangelical practices with theological and social witness beliefs more common among progressive mainliners. While McLaren probably is more progressive than most U.S. evangelicals, he is part of a growing movement leftward in some evangelical circles. As such, he is representative of—and a promoter of—one possible American evangelical future. ■



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The Religious Left's Rebuttal

by Mark D. Tooley

On Saturday, December 2, incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid asked Jim Wallis, the self-described “progressive Christian” activist, to give the Democrats’ official response to President Bush’s weekly radio address. It was a curious, odd moment—the equivalent of Republicans inviting Jerry Falwell to respond on their behalf to a Democratic president.

“The senator thought a non-partisan religious leader could speak to the moral values our nation needs,” Wallis explained beforehand to his Sojourners constituency. Wallis, author of the best-selling *God’s Politics* and a once angry-toned 1960s street activist, has in recent years attempted to become the chief spokesman for the evangelical left. His radio stint in the place of congressional Democrats suggests he may have finally succeeded.

In the 2004 elections, evangelical voters were the Republican Party’s largest and most reliable constituency. Since then, Democrats have focused on peeling away the GOP’s advantage among conservative Protestants.

Democratic efforts to refocus evangelicals away from gay marriage and abortion in favor of the environment and poverty seem mostly to have failed. In 2004, the Republican advantage among evangelicals was 75 percent to 24, according to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. In 2006, that advantage slipped only a few points, to 72 percent to 27 percent.

The Republican advantage among churchgoers as a whole slipped from 18 points to 12 points. Meanwhile, Democrats made significant gains among Catholics and non-evangelical Protestants. But evangelicals remained a pillar of Republican loyalty while the party lost ground among almost every other demographic group. Which is where Wallis comes in.

For his own part, Wallis made a show of stressing the significance of his radio address. He said that accepting

Reid’s radio broadcast invitation, which is normally reserved for Democratic office holders, was a “difficult decision.”

“I work hard to maintain my independence and non-partisanship, and didn’t want to be perceived as supporting one party over the other,” Wallis explained on his Sojourners website. “But it was an occasion to get our message to millions of people, so I decided to accept” and “act in a new way.” Wallis insisted that he would have responded just as favorably to a Republican invitation.

In fact, Wallis receives few invitations to speak to Republican audiences. By contrast, he has been a favorite speaker at Democratic gatherings and confidante of Democratic officials. The Sojourners voters’ guide for 2006 aligned neatly with Democratic positions on issue after issue.

Yet Wallis’s broadcast stressed his supposed non-partisan identity: “I want to be clear that I am not speaking for the Democratic Party, but as a person of faith who feels the hunger in America for a new vision of our life together, and sees the opportunity to apply our best moral values to the urgent problems we face.” He hit his usual notes about an “anti-poverty agenda” that reduces “the gap between rich and poor,” about extricating U.S. troops from a “disastrous” war in Iraq, about protecting the “earth and the fragile atmosphere” from global warming, and about finding “common ground” to reduce abortions without prohibiting them.

Wallis’s rhetoric today is more soothing and mainstream than it was in 1996, when he denounced President Clinton for backing welfare reform. Clinton, Wallis then said, had “sacrificed” the most vulnerable upon the “altar of political expediency,” unleashing what was sure to be a “hurricane of human suffering.” But the hurricane never came, and Wallis realized that ‘60s-style hyperbole was no longer politically viable. He shifted, at least rhetorically, from far left to center left.

Not wanting to antagonize evangelicals or secular liberals, Wallis now tries to navigate carefully around social issues. He warns against “scapegoating” homosexuals, while not specifically supporting same-sex unions. He wants to reduce abortions through enlarged social programs, without enacting any legal restrictions on abortions. Wallis remains a pacifist but usually avoids mentioning that fact. He condemns the Iraq war in particular without broadcasting his view that any military action would be unacceptable. When questioned by secularists who are distressed by Wallis’s “evangelical” identity, he likens himself to 19th-century evangelicals who opposed slavery and child labor.

Of course, most evangelicals have never defined themselves by their social causes but rather by their personal faith in Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible. Wallis is more akin to early 20th-century Social Gospel advocates who rejected “fundamentalism” in favor of progressive social reform. Their spiritual descendants are now primarily the clerisy of declining, liberal mainline Protestantism, whose demographic implosion cleared the way for evangelical predominance.

Attempting to speak to seriously religious Americans, especially to evangelicals, is smart politics for Democrats. Whether or not Jim Wallis—a former Students for a Democratic Society agitator—is the Democrats’ best tool for this outreach, is a very open question. ■

This article originally appeared online at the Weekly Standard (www.weeklystandard.com).



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Uncertain Future

The National Association of Evangelicals After Ted Haggard

by Alan F.H. Wisdom

Throughout its history, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) has sought public attention for America's evangelical Protestant community. Once neglected and marginalized, that community now stands as perhaps the nation's largest religious bloc. Since the association's founding in 1942, evangelicals have grown not only in numbers but also in influence and recognition.

Accordingly, the NAE has raised its public profile—especially through its Office of Governmental Affairs in Washington, DC. Yet the organization remains

small, with eight employees and a \$686,000 annual budget. Many of the NAE's claimed 30 million constituents were probably unaware of the organization's existence before the

been caught in a relationship with a male prostitute. The news shocked the NAE and embarrassed the evangelical community, giving apparent confirmation to those already inclined to stereotype evangelicals as arrogant hypocrites.

This stereotype fed much of the press coverage, with headlines blaring that an “anti-gay evangelical preacher” had been “outed.” Ironically, opposition to homosexuality had not been a major NAE theme under Haggard's leadership. The Colorado Springs pastor was indeed opposed to same-sex marriage and expansive definitions of “gay rights”; however, he had tried hard to “broaden the evangelical agenda” to include other concerns such as defending human rights abroad, fighting poverty, combating HIV/AIDS, and caring for the environment.

Yet the message had not registered sufficiently. At their darkest hour, Haggard, the NAE, and the evangelical community were still typecast as “anti-gay.” The damage may have been limited by the prompt, firm, and dignified manner in which the NAE president was removed from his positions and sent off to seek repentance and restoration. But his departure, and the sudden need to find new NAE leadership, brought to the fore the long-term questions about the association's identity and purpose.

What Does ‘Evangelical’ Mean?

What is the distinctive image of evangelicalism that the NAE seeks to project? What is the unique focus of its work, distinguishing the NAE from other evangelical organizations? Is the focus on theology? Is it on evangelism? Is it on cooperative service to society? Is it on politics? If there is an emphasis on politics, are the

Haggard's departure brought to the fore the long-term questions about the association's identity and purpose

first week of last November.

That week the association's name was splashed across newspapers and national newscasts. But the attention was not welcome. What garnered such coverage was the revelation that the NAE president—the Rev. Ted Haggard, pastor of an evangelical megachurch in Colorado Springs—had

SCANDAL (ABOVE) Former NAE President Ted Haggard was caught in a relationship with a male prostitute last fall, shocking the NAE and embarrassing the evangelical community. (Robyn Beck/AFP)

NAE's politics to be conservative, moderate, or liberal? Will the association be informally aligned with the Republicans or with the Democrats? Or will it try to play both sides of the aisle?

These questions challenge not only the NAE, but also the broader evangelical community for which it attempts to speak. At this point in history, what does it mean to be an evangelical in America? Efforts to craft a definition have proven notoriously tricky.

If evangelical unity is sought in theology, what is the common theology? Evangelicals range from starchy Calvinists to fiery Pentecostals. The NAE has a short "Statement of Faith." But its articles (e.g., the deity of Christ, his atonement for sin, his bodily resurrection and return) are not uniquely evangelical. These doctrines would be affirmed by all orthodox Christians.

Equally futile is the attempt to nail down evangelical identity on the basis of characteristic practices. Any that might be suggested—for example, enthusiastic worship, evangelistic "altar calls," personal testimonies of "born-again" experiences, or abstinence from "worldly" entertainments—turns out not to be shared by a significant section of the evangelical community. In the end, evangelicalism seems to be more a matter of attitude. Anyone who wants the label "evangelical" can claim it.

The NAE founders claimed that name for the sake of a perceived common cause. But it was always easier to say what the NAE was *not* rather than what it was. On the one hand, the NAE was not the National Council of Churches. It would have no truck with the watered-down liberal theology that prevailed in many NCC circles, and it was deeply suspicious of the NCC's utopian "Social Gospel" ambitions. Established consciously as an alternative to the NCC, the NAE had a statement of faith that deliberately excluded NCC liberals. Denominations affiliated with the NCC were barred from membership in the NAE.

On the other hand, NAE evangelicals distinguished themselves from the separatist, fratricidal fundamentalists. One of the association's earliest endeavors was to secure access to the airwaves for reputable Christian broadcasters. In doing so, the

NAE was careful to condemn "charlatan" evangelists who preached hatred.

Thus the NAE has stood in a delicate equipoise, well captured in the association's motto: "Cooperation without Compromise." Unlike the earlier fundamentalists, the NAE has sought cooperation in Christian ministry. Unlike the NCC, it has rejected theological compromise.

Regarding politics, too, the NAE has attempted to keep a balance. Carl F.H. Henry (later a member of the IRD board) exercised great influence in the NAE's early years with his call for speaking biblical, "redemptive," and "supernaturalistic" truth to "such admitted social evils as aggressive warfare, racial hatred and intolerance, the liquor traffic, and exploitation of labor or management" (*The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947], 3).

Yet NAE leaders also expressed reservations about excessive entanglements in partisan politics. A 1968 NAE resolution warned against the "double risk" that the Christian "who devotes his energies to justice, equality and peace may fail to keep upmost in his testimony that Christ came to seek and to save those who were lost. And, in his desire to be relevant in his testimony, he may lend support to objectives that seem to advance the cause of justice, equality and peace by secular standards, but which do not accord with the will of God."

The Balance is Tilted

But these balances seem to have become tilted in recent years. As the "Religious Right" has come to prominence and the NCC has declined, NAE leaders have seemed more determined to differentiate themselves from the former than the latter.

At the same time, the association has been drawn ever deeper into political advocacy. This process is described, approvingly, in "A History of the Public Policy Resolutions of the National Association of Evangelicals," by Richard Cizik, the current NAE Vice President for Governmental Affairs. (Cizik's essay appears in Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers, eds., *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

Books, 2005], 35–63.)

According to Cizik, the early NAE "largely steered clear of domestic political action." Its conventions expressed general sentiments on a few big issues—for example, the perceived dangers of communist subversion and state funding of Roman Catholic schools—and "[t]here was occasional testimony before congressional committees and advocacy to the State Department on overseas concerns." But the association was not trying to be a big player in the Washington lobbying scene.

In the late 1950s, as Cizik tells it, the NAE began "moving into the mainstream." Twenty years later, this process yielded a decision that the association "would have to expand its Washington presence." Cizik boasts of the political influence that the NAE Washington office (including himself) gained during the 1980s: "The NAE staff members were increasingly consulted about [Reagan] administration appointments and policy, and they seized the opportunity to influence government." He admits, with apparent ambivalence, that by 1992 "it had been electoral politics, not evangelism, that had become the [evangelical] movement's calling card."

Cizik sees a new boost in NAE's political influence after his own accession as Washington office director in 1997. Citing a 2002 *New York Times* column, he remarks that "the NAE and other groups had already been influential in changing government policy for at least five years." The NAE official concludes that "the organization serves a critical need, providing order and stability for a diverse and competitive movement while projecting a respected voice for otherwise silent multitudes from coast to coast."

On many issues—for example, seeking to restrict alcohol advertising, interceding for persecuted Christians overseas, and defending the right of evangelical military chaplains to pray in the name of Jesus—the NAE undoubtedly represents its evangelical constituency. There usually are NAE board resolutions authorizing the general positions taken, although not necessarily endorsing the specific legislation for which the NAE Washington office is lobbying.

The board resolutions refer to Scripture

“the only infallible, authoritative Word of God,” according to the NAE Statement of Faith) as the ground for evangelical concern about these issues. But they do not attempt to derive every NAE political position directly from the biblical text. Thus the association has a long history of espousing some positions that are not, strictly speaking, the Word of God. Instead those positions represent the political judgment of the NAE board and staff.

Delving into Divisive Issues

For the NAE, as for every political group, the trickiest issues are those where the constituency is divided. In some such cases, the association wisely refrained from taking sides. For example, Cizik recounts, “While most of the members of the association opposed Carter’s Panama Canal Treaty [in 1977], missionaries and other Latin American ministry heads successfully persuaded NAE leaders against taking a stand.” Likewise, regarding the 2003 U.S. intervention in Iraq, “The organization’s board of directors declined to take a position on the Iraq conflict, citing concern for missionaries and indigenous Christians overseas.”

But this reticence has not been not consistent. In 1990–1991 NAE officials—without explicit board authorization—had “expressed their support for President Bush’s leadership in assembling a coalition of nations to forcibly remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait,” according to Cizik. In the late 1990s, when “debates on Capitol Hill over most-favored-nation status for China ... divide[d] the evangelical community,” NAE staff again took a stand without explicit board authorization. Cizik reports that “NAE testimony made the claim that permanent normal-trade-relations (PNTR) would over time best serve the cause of religious freedom.”

This same pattern of unauthorized advocacy on divisive issues has recurred more recently. Cizik has declared himself “called out” to lead a campaign on environmental issues, especially global warming. Even though the NAE Board of Directors has adopted no position on the latter issue, and even though the Executive Committee instructed staff to “stand by and not exceed

The NAE in Its Own Words

According to the NAE mission statement, “The mission of the National Association of Evangelicals is to extend the kingdom of God through a fellowship of member denominations, churches, organizations, and individuals, demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ by standing for biblical truth, speaking with a representative voice, and serving the evangelical community through united action, cooperative ministry, and strategic planning.”

The NAE entry in the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* says, “The association is comprised of approximately 45,000 congregations nationwide from 52 member denominations and fellowships, as well as several hundred independent churches.” Among the larger NAE denominations are the Assemblies of God, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), the Church of the Nazarene, the Evangelical Free Church of America, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Salvation Army. Also included are some 250 parachurch ministries.

“Through the cooperative ministries of these members,” the NAE says that it “directly and indirectly benefits over 30 million people.”

in any fashion our approved and adopted statements concerning the environment,” Cizik has appeared in numerous media outlets proclaiming that “climate change is real and induced and calls for action.” The NAE official has vowed to “squeeze the Republicans until they see the light” and support new government regulations to counter global warming. (See Steve Rempe, “Evangelical Official Raises Global Warming Concerns,” *Faith & Freedom*, Summer 2006. See also “Getting Green Religion,” p. 26.)

Cizik has also used his NAE title in endorsing a petition against torture that alleges that the practice “is condemned in word but allowed in deed” by the Bush administration. Materials supporting the petition accuse U.S. military and intelligence agencies of “sponsoring” torture as a systematic policy.

Similarly, Cizik has backed the Evangelicals for Darfur petition that targets President Bush, as if he were the main obstacle blocking humanitarian intervention to stop the Darfur genocide. “Without you, Mr. President, Darfur doesn’t have a prayer,” the petition begs. It says nothing about the Sudanese government forces that are actually carrying out the genocide. (See “What are Evangelicals Doing About Darfur?” p. 12.)

All of these controversial political judgments go well beyond any plain scriptural teaching. None of them has been

authorized by the NAE board. None of them would have consensus support in the evangelical community. All of them have the effect of separating the NAE politically from one of the two political parties: the Republican Party.

From ‘Insiders’ to Triangulators

The fact is that, in recent decades, the NAE’s claimed constituency has trended strongly Republican. Exit polls from the 2006 congressional elections showed that, even in a bad year for Republicans, 72 percent of self-identified evangelicals voted for GOP candidates. Whether or not that partisan loyalty is justified, it is the reality among the NAE’s claimed constituency.

In earlier years, NAE officials seemed comfortable as “political insiders” (Cizik’s phrase) in Republican circles. Cizik’s historical essay recalls with pride how Republican presidents from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush addressed NAE conventions. The association’s staff was even granted a hand in shaping Reagan’s speeches, Cizik says.

Yet some uneasiness arose regarding this cozy relationship. “We are in danger of becoming, if not already identified as, the political arm of one party, a very dangerous position to be in,” warned then NAE President Don Argue in 1993. The NAE response to this danger has not been to

withdraw from partisan politics, but rather to play some compensatory footsie with the Democrats. Cizik recounts how the association benefited from President Clinton's strategy of "triangulation." The result, according to Cizik, was that "there was always an open door for the NAE staff members at the [Clinton] White House." Nevertheless, he admits that "the annual resolutions [of the NAE board] usually criticized Clinton administration policies."

The NAE's relationship with George W. Bush started off well. "President Bush's language and programs resonated with the NAE and evangelicals generally," Cizik says. He describes how association staff worked with the Bush White House to advance its "faith-based initiative."

But somewhere along the line the relationship must have soured. Not only has Cizik turned against the administration on issues ranging from global warming to torture allegations, but his public remarks have repeatedly evinced a personal animus against the Bush White House.

The most remarkable illustration occurred in February 2006, when Bush domestic policy adviser Claude Allen resigned for unspecified reasons. The

Washington Times (Feb. 17, 2006) quoted the NAE's Cizik speculating that the resignation resulted from Allen standing up for his evangelical faith. "They [the Bush White House] don't take kindly to someone serving too strongly the evangelical cause," Cizik told the *Times*. "The people in the White House want someone who will salute, no matter what. If you are an evangelical, you get special scrutiny. They know evangelicals are obedient to a higher principle." It later came out that Allen resigned because he had been arrested for shoplifting.

Meanwhile, the "triangulation" strategy has reappeared. In the May 29, 2006, issue of *The New Republic*, reporter Amy Sullivan discussed a screening of the documentary *The Great Warming* (featuring Cizik) at Messiah College in April 2006. The follow-up panel discussion, in which Cizik participated alongside Democratic Senate candidate Bob Casey, turned into a non-stop assault on the environmental record of incumbent Republican Senator Rick Santorum. (Santorum was invited to the event but did not attend.) Sullivan, after an interview with Cizik, discerned a partisan slant:

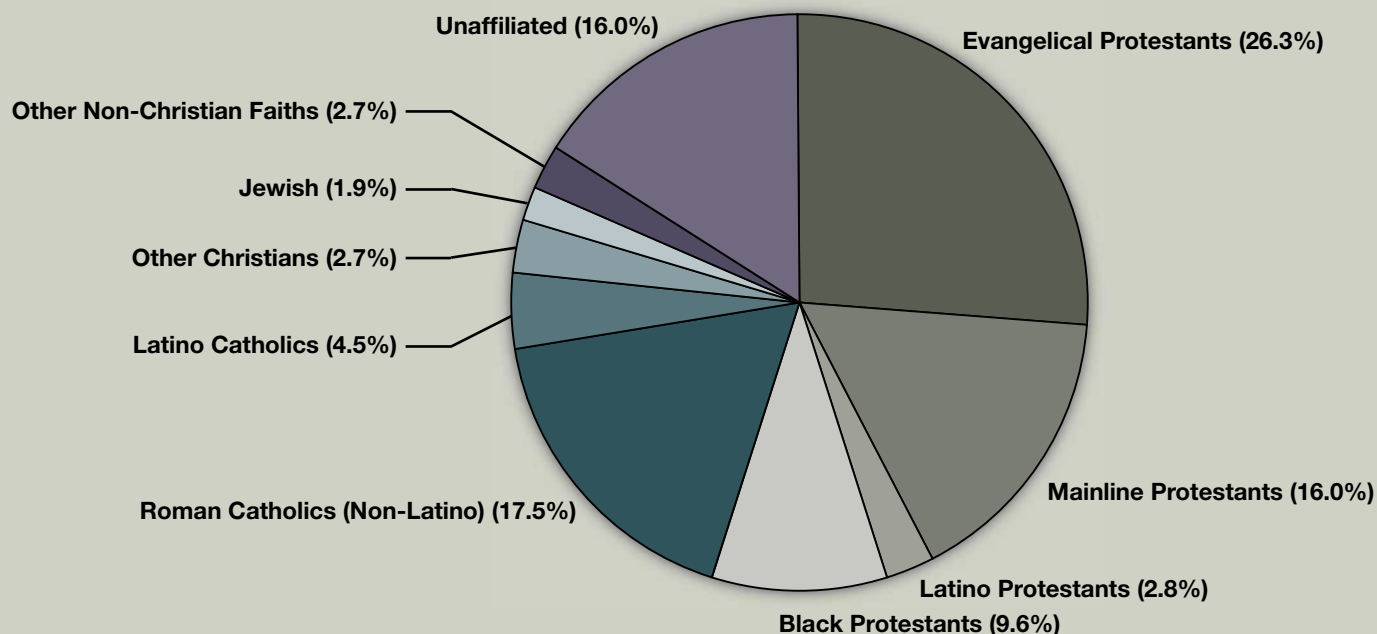
... the NAE has made the Keystone State the testing ground for a new strategy—one that favors not the hot-button issues of abortion and gay marriage, which traditionally have helped Republican candidates, but other causes on the evangelical agenda that more closely track with Democratic positions. "There's going to be a lot of political reconsideration of this in the coming year," Cizik told me. "The old faultlines are no more."

It is noteworthy that Cizik's historical essay twice uses the same dismissive phrase, "hot-button," to refer to evangelical concerns involving unborn children and the defense of marriage.

Is It All about Politics?

In the public perception, it is clear that the NAE is mostly about politics these days. A review of the NAE websites (www.nae.net and the associated www.revision.org) shows that the vast majority of the material posted is about political issues. And the issue that gets more attention than any other is

Religious Identifications of U.S. Adults



Source: John C. Green, "The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004," a survey commissioned by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, available online at www.pewforum.org/publications/surveys/green-full.pdf. **Note: This tabulation may underestimate the number of evangelicals. A significant portion of mainline Protestants, Latino Protestants, and black Protestants might also be classified as "evangelical."**

the environment—especially global warming.

The results from a Nexis search for “National Association of Evangelicals” over the past year are enlightening. Of 987 NAE media mentions that the search yielded, 516 related principally to the Haggard scandal. Among the other 471 mentions, 337 (or 72 percent) had politics as their main topic.

By far the leading issue linked to the NAE was the environment and global warming, with 37 percent of the non-Haggard-scandal mentions. General political commentary, usually relating to how evangelicals would vote and the parties and ideologies with which they aligned themselves, received 13 percent of the mentions. Other specific issues trailed far behind: immigration (5 percent), Sudan/Darfur (3 percent), upholding free exercise of religion in the U.S. military and elsewhere (3 percent), and the Mideast (2 percent).

If this Nexis search is any indication, the NAE certainly has not been caught up in the “hot button” culture wars issues. Only three percent of the NAE media mentions related to its opposition to same-sex marriage, and less than one percent involved opposition to abortion.

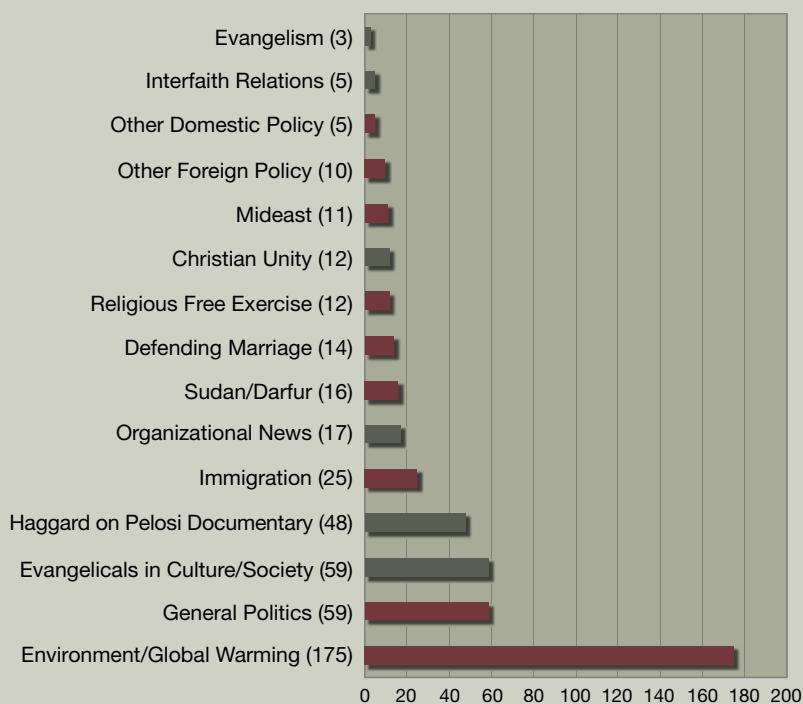
Commentary on the place of evangelicals in U.S. society and culture, and their portrayal in the arts, occupied 13 percent of the NAE mentions. Ten percent dealt with the (embarrassing) appearance of Ted Haggard in the Alexandra Pelosi documentary film “Friends of God.”

Only three percent of the NAE mentions concerned efforts toward Christian unity with non-evangelicals. One percent related to interfaith dialogue with non-Christian religions. A mere three mentions out of the 471 involved evangelism, in the sense of inviting non-Christians to place their faith in Jesus Christ.

All this evidence raises the question of what the NAE has become. Is it possible that the association has come to resemble its old rival, the National Council of Churches? Despite manifest theological differences, there are some striking analogies.

Both organizations were established in the mid-20th century with a mission of Christian unity. Yet both were increasingly drawn into political advocacy. Both

Main Topics of NAE Mentions (Not Related to Haggard Scandal) in Nexis Search



Red bars indicate political topics. Numbers after headings indicate the number of mentions.

have spun off some of their most popular programs—e.g., the NCC’s Church World Service relief arm and the NAE’s World Relief—and most of what’s left is politics.

Both organizations have large boards that do not exercise much oversight over the staff. Consequently, staff members feel free to take positions based on their own political judgment. There is often no direct scriptural mandate for these positions, and in many cases there is no explicit board authorization. Frequently, there has not been an open, balanced discussion among the member denominations about the most difficult issues.

Many of those denominations have no stated position on these issues; they know their constituency is divided. Yet both organizations go ahead with political advocacy that risks the relationship with that constituency.

By the end of the 20th century, both the NCC and NAE faced financial crises. Both have survived, but they are not thriving. The relevance of both organizations to the enterprise of Christian unity is called into question.

To be sure, the NAE is nowhere near as far down the road as the NCC in alienating its own constituents and rendering itself ecumenically counter-productive. There is a much better chance that the NAE can be turned back toward its mission to “extend the kingdom of God...,” demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ by standing for biblical truth.”

As the NAE decides on its future leadership, it will have to answer: Does it wish to go further down the same road after the NCC? Or can it reclaim a distinctly evangelical identity that reflects the priorities of the member denominations and the larger evangelical community? Will the NAE board set the direction, and will the staff be accountable to the board? In the end, will the NAE be about more than politics? ■



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Bishops Try to Block Bush Library

by Mark D. Tooley

Late last year, dozens of faculty members at Southern Methodist University (SMU) publicly opposed the possibility that George W. Bush might locate his presidential library on SMU's campus in Dallas. Now, 10 bishops of the United Methodist Church, which owns the school, and of which President Bush is a member, are urging SMU to reject the library. The bishops are also circulating a petition for others to sign.

A chief organizer in stopping the library is a former professor at SMU's Perkins School of Theology, who told the *Dallas Morning News* that he doesn't want his school to "hitch its future star" to the Iraq war and other aspects of President Bush's legacy.

"What moral justification supports SMU's providing a haven for a legacy of environmental predation and denial of global warming, shameful exploitation of gay rights and the most critical erosion of *habeas corpus* in memory?" asked the Rev. William McElvaney, in an op-ed for an SMU campus publication last fall.

The 78-year-old McElvaney is a former Texas oilman who went to SMU's seminary, where he exchanged his family's conservative politics for the Social Gospel. As the *Dallas Morning News* described him, McElvaney as a seminary professor "preached against the Vietnam War" and "supported a variety of causes, including civil rights, gay rights, low-cost housing and better treatment of immigrants."

One of over 120 colleges and universities affiliated with United Methodism, SMU is legally owned by the United Methodist Church's South Central Jurisdiction. Half of its trustees are church members—including three bishops, the pastor of President Bush's home church in Dallas, and First Lady Laura Bush. But the 11,000-student school has long governed itself autonomously. The denomination typically exercises little direct influence, except over the seminary, which has been

theologically liberal for many decades.

McElvaney was among the first to mobilize public opposition to the Bush library. But the recently unveiled petition, which McElvaney signed, was organized by New York therapist and ordained United Methodist minister Andrew Weaver.

"Methodists have a long history of social conscience, so questions about the conduct of this president are very concerning," Weaver told the Associated Press.

Weaver's anti-Bush library website references Bush administration policies about war, "kidnapping and torture," and Hurricane Katrina. For his part, McElvaney complains that a Bush library would mean that SMU supports "a pre-emptive war based on false premises, misleading the American public, and destined to cost more American lives in Iraq than the 9/11 terrorist attack," along with "the death of thousands of innocent Iraqis by our 'shock and awe' bombing in the name of democracy...."

Not all United Methodist officials agree with McElvaney, Weaver, and the bishops who signed the anti-Bush petition. "I think it's a fringe group, a marginal group without any standing other than the fact they happen to be one of eight million United Methodists," the Rev. Mark Craig told the *Dallas Morning News*. An SMU trustee, Craig is pastor of the 13,000-member Highland Park United Methodist Church (where the Bushes are members).

Craig told the newspaper that the vast majority of his own congregation supports SMU's hosting the library because it would help the school and the city. Craig called Bush "a good Methodist, and anyone who says other than that is being grossly judgmental."

The United Methodist Council of Bishops, including Bishop Will Willimon of North Alabama, has repeatedly condemned the Iraq war. But Willimon told the *Dallas Morning News* that he, too, supports the Bush library. Formerly the dean

of the chapel at Duke University (another United Methodist school), Willimon regretted that Duke had rejected the possibility of hosting the presidential library of Richard Nixon, who had attended Duke's law school.

"It was a great loss to Duke not to get the Nixon library," Willimon was quoted as saying. "Universities are supposed to be places for intellectuals, and intellectuals are supposed to be curious about everything.... Wherever the Bush library ends up, I hope scholars will be standing in line the day it opens to get their hands on the papers and figure out what happened" with the Iraq war.

Library opponent Andrew Weaver is less curious. "George Bush has been, in his presidency, so inconsistent with fundamental Christianity that he should not be associated with a Methodist university," he told the Dallas paper. "Methodist means decency, and this man has not been decent."

The ten, mostly retired bishops who signed Weaver's petition are in a somewhat odd position. Bishops have almost always defended their schools' academic independence, even as they often served on the schools' boards and helped channel church funding to them. But hosting the library of President Bush is apparently a bridge too far for some of the church's bishops and the 4,000 other signatories to the anti-Bush library petition.

They have finally found a heresy that they cannot accept. 📖

This article originally appeared online at the Weekly Standard (www.weeklystandard.com).



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Getting Green Religion

by Mark D. Tooley

Ostensibly, evangelicals and global warming activists are getting cozy. Or so some scientists and several evangelicals claimed at a press conference in Washington, DC, this January.

The press event seems to have been sponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), although that is not entirely clear. More clear was the enthusiastic participation of NAE's political spokesman in the nation's capital, Richard Cizik, who has become a global warming evangelist.

Other featured global warming enthusiasts were NASA official James Hansen, Harvard biologist Edward Wilson, Florida megachurch pastor Joel Hunter, Harvard oceanographer Jim McCarthy, and Eric Chivian of Harvard Medical School, among others.

Some on the evangelical left are pushing evangelicals, who have become America's largest religious and political constituency, to expand their political scope beyond conservative social issues to embrace environmentalism—global warming especially. Cizik's outspoken support

for this perspective caused NAE's Executive Committee officially to remind him last year that NAE has no official position on climate change.

The Executive Committee action has not tempered Cizik's passion for the cause but has forced him to conduct some of his climate advocacy in his name only rather than with NAE's imprimatur. So, although

the press conference was described as NAE-sponsored, the joint statement of scientists and evangelicals released at the event was not NAE-endorsed.

Interestingly, the "Urgent Call to Action: Scientists and Evangelicals United to Protect Creation" manifesto does not dwell on or even specifically mention "global warming." Instead, it references "climate change, habitat destruction, pollution, and species extinctions." The scientists and preachers readily agreed "not only that reckless human activity has imperiled the Earth—especially the unsustainable and short-sighted lifestyles and public policies of our own nation—but also that we share a profound moral obligation to work together to call our nation, and other nations, to the kind of dramatic change urgently required in our day."

The statement tries not to sound too alarmist, but its attempts at cool reason betray an underlying sense of panic: "We are gradually destroying the sustaining community of life on which all living things on Earth depend." The cost to humanity may become "incalculable" and "irreversible." The manifesto expresses "concern for the poorest of the poor," while also warning that the Earth's precarious "biodiversity," which "barely hangs on," cannot possibly "survive the press of destitute people without other resources and with nowhere else to go."

So which is more important, protecting the "biodiversity" or helping the "poorest of the poor"? It's not entirely clear, although planetary biodiversity appears to rank higher. Naturally, the coalition wants "public policies" that respond to its concerns, and it will not tolerate any "further delays." The scientists and evangelicals will be pushing for more "responsible care for creation," without specifying how. But there are some clues elsewhere.

Cizik and Harvard Medical School's Dr. Chivian sent a joint letter to President Bush, announcing their new initiative, asking to meet with him, and warning that their new coalition will "grow in size and influence and...will capture the attention and imagination of large numbers of Americans."

In his own statement, Chivian explained that he and his "close friend" Cizik hatched the idea last year, leading to a "private retreat" for 30 scientists and evangelicals, representing "two enormously powerful communities." Together they reviewed the science, and naturally there was "no disagreement" that the world is "imperiled by human behaviors," specifically the "burning of fossil fuels."

Cizik, in his statement, was predictably a little more apocalyptic in his language. "If we believe that God will judge us for destroying Creation—in such ways as loss of biodiversity and climate change—we evangelicals should be more vigilant than others."

NASA Institute for Space Studies chief James Hansen offered hope that avoiding "dramatic climate change" is still possible, but only with draconian action, perhaps even reducing carbon emissions by 80 percent by century's end. Harvard biologist Edward Wilson was just as insistent, warning that at the current rate of environmental degradation, one half of the Earth's species of plants and animals will be "extinguished or critically endangered" in less than a century.

Peter Raven of the Missouri Botanical Garden was equally dire in his prophecy: "The projected loss of perhaps half of all species of plants and animals on Earth

Some on the left are pushing evangelicals to expand their political scope beyond conservative social issues to embrace environmentalism—especially activism against global warming.

during the course of the 21st century represents an extinction event as catastrophic as that which ended the age of dinosaurs 65 million years ago—but in this case, we and we alone are responsible.”

This species genocide can be faulted on one cause only: people. According to Raven, “current mass extinction results from pressures associated with the rapidly growing numbers of human beings, our increasing expectations for individual consumption, and our continuing and spreading use of often unsustainable technologies.”

There were a few expressions of concern by the preachers and scientists about poor people, whom higher temperatures might punish more than the rest of humanity. But the focus was on the “planet.” While the press conference participants found it uncomfortable to admit, reducing global carbon emissions, along with the accompanying reduced economic growth, would not offer much hope to the impoverished.

Rich people burn more fuel than poor people. What if the world’s poor were suddenly to become middle class? From this

group’s perspective, the consequences for the planet would be catastrophic.

Global warming, as an issue, is primarily a cause for wealthy and middle class professional people in North America and Western Europe—especially the latter, where green parties have compelled their governments to become outspoken. In part, the evangelical left’s demands are an expression of guilt over that wealth. Forcing others to reduce their consumption becomes a means of atonement.

Here is the appeal for some evangelicals, anxious to escape cultural stereotypes, but still preoccupied by concerns about divine judgment. Christians are supposed to shun riches anyway, though too few actually do. But if hellfire will not persuade, maybe global warming will. Shun that SUV, or you will burn!

The Rev. Joel Hunter, whose brief tenure as head of the Christian Coalition ended because of his zealous focus on global warming, explained at the press conference how this coalition will work. “They [scientists] have the facts we need to present to our congregations; we [evangelicals] have the numbers of activists that

will work through churches, government, and the business community to make a significant impact.”

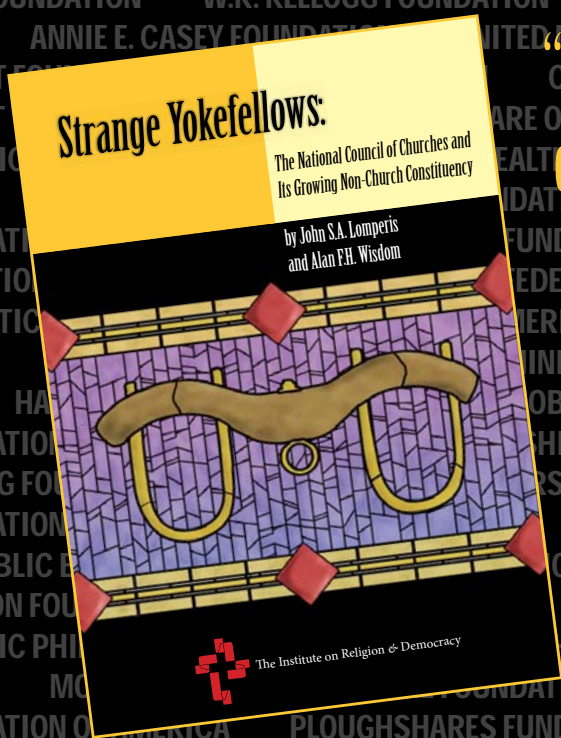
According to secularist stereotypes, evangelicals are gullible. But will they believe that carbon emissions must be reduced by 80 percent to forestall an imminent extinction of one half the world’s plant and animal life? This new coalition is hoping so. And judging by its assumptions and rhetoric, there is no room for compromise. According to Cizik, God’s creation is being “progressively destroyed by human folly.”

If nothing else, evangelicals will contribute plenty of biblically doomful and even Manichean language to the debates over climate change. ☒

This article originally appeared online at the American Spectator (www.spectator.org).



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“The National Council of Churches is more dependent on the liberal Ford Foundation than it is on 32 of its 35 member denominations.”

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The Cold Shoulder of the NCC

by James D. Berkley

One would think that a visitor to the headquarters of the National Council of Churches (NCC), a body that claims to represent and unify mainline Christians, would receive a courteous welcome. One might think so, but don't count on it. At least that's what this Presbyterian pastor discovered in January.

Simply navigating around Manhattan made me, a small-town Northwesterner, feel a little like a fish out of water. But when my coverage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) meeting took me to the NCC headquarters, I was made to feel like a fish out of place.

The National Council of Churches headquarters can be found near Columbia University at the Interchurch Center. Tucked between Barnard College, Union Theological Seminary, and Riverside

Church, the "God Box" at 475 Riverside Drive at one time was the headquarters of the northern branch of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). There, on a Thursday in January, I learned by negative example how not to be welcoming and affirming.

You May Not Be Able to Stay

I arrived ten minutes early, and the ACSWP vans pulled in more than 30 minutes late. So that

meant I had a good 40-minute wait in the NCC conference room before the meeting began. It turned out to be one of the more awkward social experiences I have ever endured.

The Rev. Marcel Welty, NCC Associate for Research and Planning, soon came into the room, preparing for the meeting. As he waited fretfully for the ACSWP contingent to arrive, I introduced myself as an observer from Presbyterian Action, a committee of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. Welty looked stunned.

"IRD?" he stammered, as if I had said I were from the Gestapo. "Pretty crazy stuff comes out of that organization!" Now Welty was both fretful and anxious. What kind of creature had descended on the NCC offices? "I'll have to check with the General Secretary about this," he informed me. "You may not be able to stay."

I may not be able to stay? I told him that the ACSWP is required to hold open meetings, and besides, I had just traveled nearly three hours in a snowstorm to attend. With an "I don't want things I've said coming out in some IRD brochure!" Welty disappeared.

Two minutes later, he reappeared with a reassuring, "The General Secretary says, 'Welcome.'" Okay, so apparently the likes of me could be tolerated at the National Council of Churches—unaccustomed as they are to a representative of that alien species called "conservative," a strong plurality of those they claim to represent.

I sat quietly at the other end of the room from Welty, wishing I could trade 30 more minutes of sleep for this awkward wait. I had come simply to observe and report on a meeting, after all, not to be the unwitting subject of an IRD-incursion drill at the NCC. But Welty wanted to make conversation.

When in Doubt, Insult

"So, what do you think of President Bush?" he asked, with all the social grace and delicacy of a drunken hippopotamus. Why politics, of all subjects? What caused Welty, as host, to start with something so obviously divisive for a sociable topic of conversation with a guest? Why not ask about my church or my family for starters? Why home in on an expected bone of contention?

I told him I didn't give much consideration to politics. I have much more interest in the church. No, I said, I hadn't listened to President Bush's State of the Union address. I'd been traveling.

Welty wouldn't believe it. I must be tricking him. Certainly politics has to be what drives me, because he is convinced that partisan politics is the *sine qua non* of my and IRD's existence. "So what has been your field of work?" he probed. "What did you do before coming to IRD?"

I told him I've been a Presbyterian pastor for nearly 32 years. He looked disoriented. For the next half hour, in fits and starts, the conversation continued like this.

Welty thought it okay to announce that he considered evangelicals and conservative Christians uninformed and not very perceptive—rather childlike and uncomprehending, actually. They just haven't learned very much over the last few decades of great progress by others, he explained, oblivious to the fact that he was talking to one.

Welty thought it okay to announce that he considered evangelicals and conservative Christians uninformed and not very perceptive—rather childlike and uncomprehending, actually.



NO DIALOGUE HERE Bob Edgar heckles the IRD while addressing the ACSWP on January 25, 2007, at the NCC offices. From Edgar, clockwise, are Jack Terry, ACSWP Chair Gordon Edwards, Donna Bradley, Bill Saint, and Senior Administrative Assistant Bonnie Hoff. (James D. Berkley/IRD)

When I scoffed in amazement that he would haul out such a tired stereotype, Welty insisted that it must be the case. The fact that he was calling his guest stupid didn't seem to faze this host.

I couldn't believe my ears. I assured Welty that some of us had actually found our way off the turnip carts to do things like graduate as Phi Beta Kappas and earn doctorates with honors from distinguished schools. Some of us don't even drag our knuckles when we walk.

"Okay," he relented. "Some of you may even be smarter than me." But his next bold pronouncement was that evangelicals just couldn't be very spiritual then, unlike folks in the NCC. According to Welty, conservatives just don't exercise spiritual discernment on matters. I couldn't believe I was hearing such naked ignorance and bias from a national church leader—and that it was being dispensed with so little awareness of the normal niceties of courteous conversation.

Too Important to Listen

But that's when things got even more surreal, because in popped NCC General Secretary Bob Edgar. As I stood to shake his hand, thinking he had come to greet me, Edgar wasted no time in asking a long and complicated "question" that turned out to be a boastful commercial about his own success in raising money for the NCC.

Then, just as I began to respond, Edgar suddenly turned on his heel and abruptly left the room. He chose to disappear rather than dialogue. Amazing! I

felt like the victim of a drive-by muting! Before long, Edgar ventured another sortie, this time circling back to pose another long, hectoring question.

I wanted to say, "Look! I just came here to quietly observe a meeting, okay? I didn't show up to get berated!" But again, before I could say a word, Edgar wheeled and flew out the door. I had to giggle at this comical hit-and-run tactic.

I turned to Welty and asked in amusement, "Does he always do this—make a wild declaration and then run?"

"Dr. Edgar is a very busy man," Welty replied with utmost gravity.

Fortunately, soon thereafter the ACSWP members arrived and the meeting began. But even in that setting, Edgar slipped in some mocking references to IRD—"which is here!" he announced conspiratorially. He gratuitously made IRD a disparaged element of a conversation that had nothing to do with IRD, other than the fact that I was present. The lack of graciousness and—yes—tolerance was stunning.

The bottom line of this impolite performance was this: For the NCC leaders, life is politics. There simply is no other way to approach matters. Evidently the NCC exists to be a liberal political tool. Apparently the church exists to exert progressive political muscle. It's what church is all about. To the NCC.

For this reason, Welty and Edgar just assumed that my role at IRD is to promote right-wing partisan politics. They literally scoffed at anything I said to dissuade

them from this false notion. When I attested that my interest is in a church faithful to God's Word, they figured that just couldn't be. Not if politics is everything, after all.

The bottom line showed, as well, in what Welty and Edgar valued in their conversations. Since they center their work on the political, they must think that IRD's calling into question any aspect of their work must be a purely political counter-maneuver. Those who would critique the NCC, then, are political enemies. And political enemies certainly don't need to be accorded simple fellowship or given any credibility as Christians rather than as political hacks. And thus the treatment I received from these NCC leaders.

It is a pity. One would expect Christian leaders of national stature to rise above petty partisanship and narrow self-interest. One would think that a fellow Christian would find genuine welcome at the NCC, even if not agreement. Maybe the next time I visit, Marcel Welty's social repertoire will extend beyond insult and Bob Edgar will remain in the room long enough for conversation. One would hope. ☞



James D. Berkley is the Director of the Presbyterian Action program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

Methodist Advent Devotional Focuses on Torture

by Mark D. Tooley

The United Methodist social action agency celebrated Advent by spotlighting the issue of torture. The three governments it faults for that practice are North Korea, Russia, and the United States. It's the last that gets most of the coverage, although the mere citation of communist North Korea for criticism is, for the religious left, remarkable.

The Methodist lobby office in Washington, D.C., known as the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, released an Advent devotional which recalls Israel at the time of the first Christmas. It was a "a land of displaced and dispossessed people" who were "war-weary, overtaxed and heavily indebted," "military occupied, useful as a buffer zone to the Empire; bruised by ethnocentrism, had little access to equitable systems of health care, sustainable economic development, and [with] family systems and generational relationships [that] had broken down."

In short, the suffering Jews at the time of Jesus were a combination of today's Palestinians, the occupied people of Iraq, and the 40 million Americans who lack health insurance.

The devotional emphasizes that the (unnamed) people of Jesus' time were oppressed as "religious fundamentalists, driven by their greed and egos, betrayed the weak to curry favor with the strong." These first-century Falwells inflicted "scorch and burn tactics, corruption and collusion; their secret prisons and mock trials rained down on those who dared to stop and speak out, protest and question what was going on."

The Advent devotional then gets around to the real topic of the holiday season: torture.

"Torture destroys us, but we are convinced that it can protect us," the devotional warns. More bizarrely, it refers cryptically to "bodies [that] are ritually tortured in homes—places we are taught to feel safe, in churches—where we are promised

sanctuary, and by governments—where we are taught to pledge our loyalty."

Living with the "mind of Christ," the devotional affirms, requires rejecting those "responsible for legitimizing torture" and "debunking the sheer hypocrisy that peace is founded on strategies of state security with its capstone ritual torture of those perceived to be enemies and threats."

There is a brief report about human rights abuses in North Korea, based on information from Amnesty International. "Long-term food shortages have been a primary factor in the increase of public executions for such things as stealing food, as well as prisons and labor camps lacking adequate food to feed the inmates," the devotional notes. There is also a short reference, based on reports from Human Rights Watch, to Russian troops in Chechnya employing "electric shocks and beatings with boots, sticks, plastic bottles and rubber cables."

After these passing mentions of North Korea and Russia, the Advent devotional turns toward its real target: the United States as an alleged systematic practitioner of torture. Citing Amnesty International, the devotional says that 17 "children" have been detained by the United States at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Citing *Newsweek*, it notes that former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at one time approved 16 interrogation techniques for "uncooperative detainees." These included: "prolonged standing, removal of detainees' clothing, sensory deprivation, hooding during questioning, using detainee phobias to induce stress, shaving of beards, grabbing, poking or pushing, sleep adjustment, exposing detainee to an unpleasant smell."

The devotional charges that there were also non-approved techniques common at Guantánamo, such as: "exposure to cold weather or water," "face slap or stomach slap," "waterboarding, or the use of a towel and dripping water to induce misperception of suffocation, threat of death to detainees

or relatives, sleep deprivation." (U.S. law and military regulations recently have been strengthened to prevent these and other abuses.)

Typically, Advent devotionals focus more on the birth of Christ than on current events. But for the religious left, the scriptures have relevance mostly as metaphors for addressing the political bugaboos of today.

Opposing torture is laudable. Making sure that U.S. interrogators do not cross the line between legitimate and illegitimate pressure is important. And the rare religious left acknowledgment that all is not well in North Korea is refreshing.

But the inability to make moral distinctions among various governments is spiritually obtuse. Are North Korea, Russia and the United States the main practitioners of torture in the world today, with the United States deserving the most condemnation? And is shaving the beards of detained terrorists the moral equivalent of North Korea's 58 years of totalitarian brutalization, under which millions have perished?

Hundreds of thousands around the world are victimized by state-orchestrated torture, most of them by communist and Islamist regimes. But communist and Islamist torture will never excite the indignation of U.S. religious leftists. For them, even the Christmas season is a time for condemning the only government that they have any interesting in condemning: their own country's. ■

This article originally appeared online at the American Spectator (www.spectator.org).



Mark D. Tooley is the Director of the UMAction program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

Rejoining the Team I Never Left

by David P. Sheaffer

I am thrilled by the opportunity to rejoin the IRD after nearly a decade away. I first connected with the Institute while I was a senior in college and spending a semester studying in Washington, DC. I was researching a public policy issue for one of my courses, seeking to understand how churches were entering into the debate in the public square. I interviewed some leaders at the Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, my own denomination, and was shocked by the obvious partisan spin they used to frame the topic.

Having grown up in First United Methodist Church in Collingswood, NJ, an evangelical and missions-minded congregation, I had never been exposed to this side of my denomination. I was very concerned to see what the leaders from my denomination were advocating on my behalf in the nation's capital.

One of my professors encouraged me to visit the IRD to gain another perspective. As I had a chance to meet individuals like Mark Tooley, Alan Wisdom, and Diane Knippers, I was encouraged to hear how they were trying to alter the way denominational leaders in the United Methodist Church and other church bodies were using or, more accurately, misusing their influence.

It was during that semester that I felt the Lord leading me to seek opportunities to advance his kingdom through my vocation, and I joined the staff of the IRD after graduation in 1996. The opportunity to help efforts in UMAction had a personal dimension, as we were speaking up for so many United Methodist congregations like the one in which I grew up.

A year later, Erika and I were married and I went on to work for another min-



WELCOME BACK! David with his wife Erika and two children, Timothy and Rebekah. They live in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania.

istry, World Harvest Mission. World Harvest is engaged in planting churches around the world and has a significant concentration of missionaries in Europe. It is starting churches among ethnic groups like Muslims in Europe, many of whom have never been befriended by a Christian, as well as among “traditional” Europeans, most of whom have lost or grown up lacking a faith in Christ.

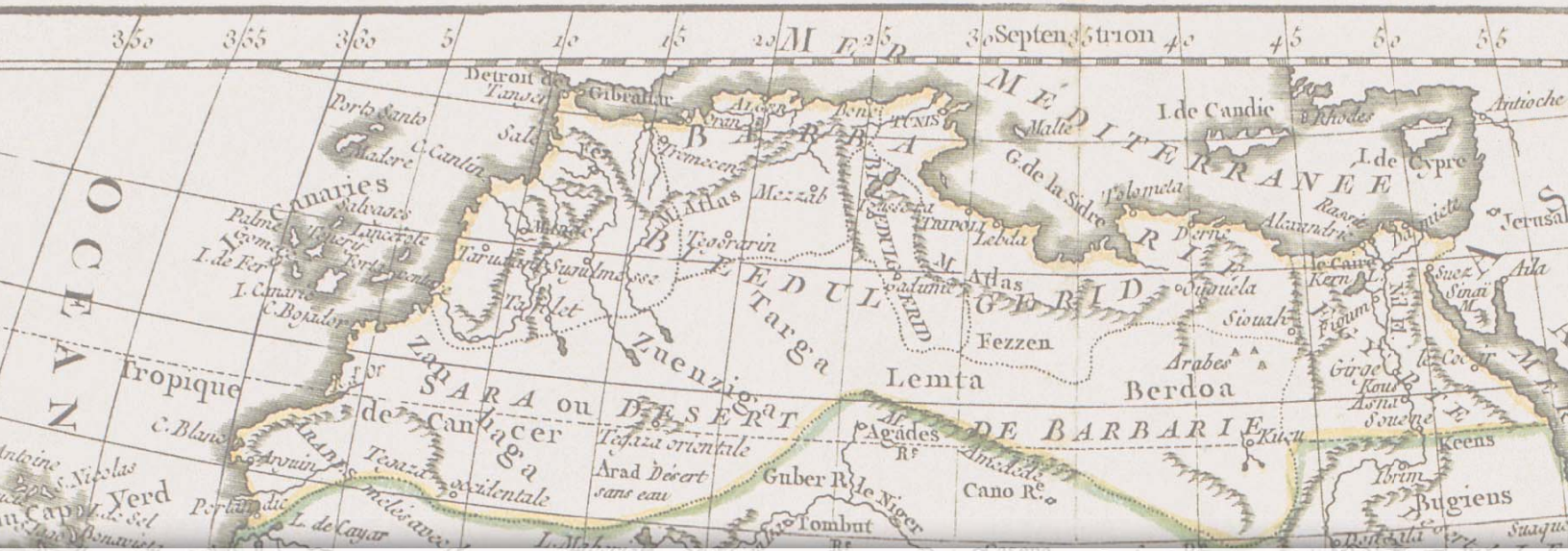
The mission is making great strides into these communities, but one of the most disheartening things I experienced was to see a former church in London having been transformed into a mosque and another into a Sikh temple. The European church has been decimated over the last century, and many houses of worship are closing.

I am hopeful that as I return to the

IRD, I can help ensure the American church doesn't follow in these footsteps. I am also excited to support our work speaking out on behalf of converts to Christ around the world living in communities that are hostile to their faith.

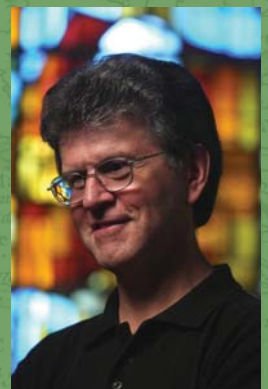
In my time with World Harvest Mission, I also developed a real passion to share about where the Lord is at work and to encourage brothers and sisters in Christ to consider using the resources with which God has entrusted them to further his kingdom. I am encouraged by the opportunities that are before the IRD, and I am looking forward to helping the ministry advance in the coming years. 🍂

David P. Sheaffer is the newly-appointed Director of Development at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.



Philip Jenkins

Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University, and author of *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity* and *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*



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A Presentation to the Board of Directors of the Institute on Religion & Democracy, March 26, 2007

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