

faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

August 2007

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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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IRD's
**LEGACY
LEAGUE**

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The View from Mount Nebo

On that same day the LORD told Moses, "Go up into the Abarim Range to Mount Nebo in Moab, across from Jericho, and view Canaan, the land I am giving the Israelites as their own possession." (Deuteronomy 32:48-49)

Moses would never enter the Promised Land and yet God gave him a glimpse. At the end of Moses' life, God brought him up to the top of Mount Nebo, east of the Jordan River, where he stood and gazed at Canaan.

At the IRD we have entitled our newest project the Mount Nebo Papers after that place of vision.

Like Moses, you and I will not enter the Promised Land this side of Christ's return. Biblical Christianity is not a utopian project promising to end war, poverty, and injustice in our time. But we can promote a social witness in our churches that advances a vision of how the world should be from a biblical and historic Christian perspective. The IRD Mount Nebo Papers will provide background and policy options for the pressing issues of our day—issues like the environment, illegal immigration, global poverty, Islamic extremism, marriage, and bioethics to name only a few.

And these will be publications for *you*, not just for policy experts. The Mount Nebo Papers will reflect the high level of scholarship you've come to expect from a think tank like the IRD. At the same time they will be written in such a way that pastors, Sunday school classes, individual Christians, and college students will be able to read and benefit as well as policy analysts, the media, members of Congress, and the administration.

There are Christians in Washington and beyond who study and write about public policy issues. Many of them are our close friends. Their Christian worldview, however, is usually implicit in what they write. It's there, but you have to know where to look.

The Mount Nebo Papers will stand out because the Christian worldview and Christian reasoning will be explicit.

For example, the paper on immigration will begin with a summary of the choices we face and then turn to what the Bible says. This will not be a list of proof texts, but a discussion of the themes of biblical theology—justice, mercy, economics, the legitimate role of government, and so on—that must inform our understanding of immigration. For example, the Exodus was a mass immigration from Egypt to Canaan. What conclusions can we draw for the current debate? And (just as important) what conclusions are illegitimate because they go beyond the meaning or application of the biblical texts?

After looking at the Bible, we move to history. Human migration is nothing new. A "Great Migration" took place in 5th century Europe. The Pilgrims who immigrated to Plymouth, Massachusetts, had immigrated to Holland before that. Over the course of 2000 years, Christian thinkers have commented about these things. What did they say that can help us today, and what are the limits to what we can apply?

With the Bible and the wisdom of the Church as background, the Mount Nebo Papers move on to evaluate current policy options. What can we say for certain because we have biblical warrant, and what prudential judgments are required? While there will be room for disagreement, the Mount Nebo Papers will, nonetheless, define the boundaries of the debate from a Christian point of view.

Rather than being focused exclusively on the Protestant mainline, the Mount Nebo Papers will be useful across the Christian community as United Methodists, Southern Baptists, Anglicans, Catholics, evangelicals, Eastern Orthodox, and Presbyterians of various stripes grapple with the issues.

Pastors, Sunday school teachers, Christian college professors, and individual believers have told us that they can't wait to get ahold of the first papers, on immigration and the environment, due to be released this fall.

One of the additional benefits is that the structure of each paper will be the same. As a result, the Mount Nebo Papers will model a paradigm for understanding public policy issues. And that paradigm can be used in dealing with town councils, school boards, and zoning commissions as well as church bodies and state and federal governments.

Dutch prime minister, theologian, and professor Abraham Kuyper famously said, "In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, 'That is mine!'" The IRD's Mount Nebo Papers will contribute to our understanding of that glorious and singular sovereignty. 📖

Jim Tonkovich



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

International Briefs

Vatican Issues 'Ten Commandments' for Motorists

In an attempt to curb "road rage" and unsafe driving practices, the Vatican's Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People has issued "ten commandments" for drivers in a document entitled "Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Road."

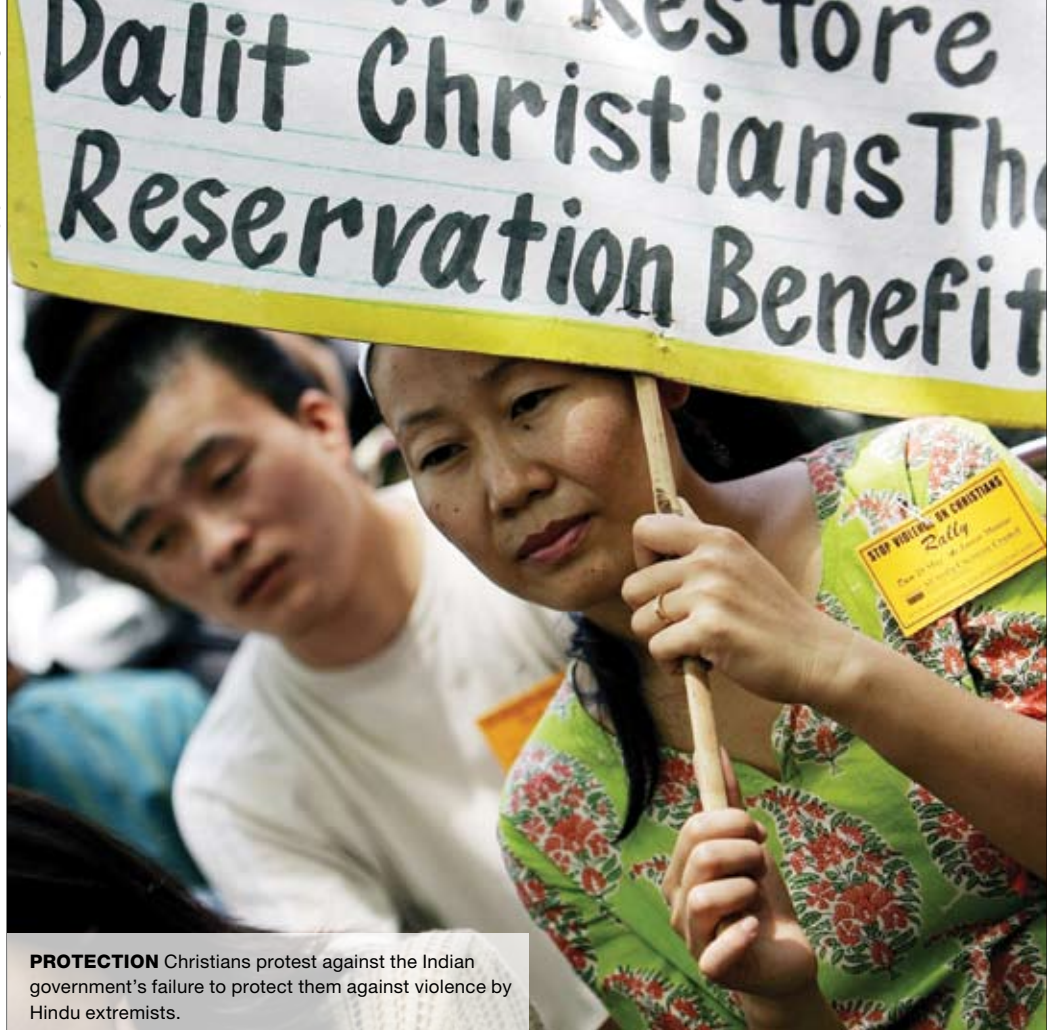
"From Christian commitment in places of road and rail transport, which we call Pastoral Care of the Road, also arises the duty to draw up and promote a fitting and corresponding expression of 'spirituality,' rooted in the Word of God," says the statement. The council notes a "dual dimension" of Christian charity when traveling—the care and maintenance of one's vehicle to ensure safety to oneself and others, and a love of fellow travelers that discourages dangerous behavior.

According to the guidelines, "Good drivers courteously give way to pedestrians, are not offended when overtaken, allow someone who wishes to drive faster to pass, and do not seek revenge."

The driver's "Ten Commandments" are:

- I. You shall not kill.
- II. The road shall be for you a means of communion between people and not of mortal harm.
- III. Courtesy, uprightness and prudence will help you deal with unforeseen events.
- IV. Be charitable and help your neighbour in need, especially victims of accidents.
- V. Cars shall not be for you an expression of power and domination, and an occasion of sin.
- VI. Charitably convince the young and not-so-young not to drive when they are not in a fitting condition to do so.
- VII. Support the families of accident victims.

Manan Vatsyayana/AFP/Getty Images



PROTECTION Christians protest against the Indian government's failure to protect them against violence by Hindu extremists.

Violence against Christians in India on the Rise

A Christian pastor in Karnataka state in India was beaten by Hindu extremists on June 8—a recent example of the increased hostilities directed against the Christian minority in that country.

Laxmi Narayan Gowda, an independent pastor in Hessarghatta, was attacked at home by a crowd of about 150 people believed to be associated with the youth wing of the Hindu World Council. Gowda was doused in kerosene as his assailants burned Bibles and other books in his home, as his wife and two small children watched. He was later stripped naked and paraded around town, wearing a sign reading, "I am the one who was converting people."

The All India Christian Council reported 128 cases of extreme violence against Christians in 2006. Since Easter (April 8), 20 episodes of serious violence against church personnel have been reported. Two of the attacks were covered by local television news crews, who apparently had been given advance notice by Hindu radicals.

"Things are going from bad to worse," said Joseph D'Souza, President of the All India Christian Council. "There is a steady increase in the number of attacks in different parts of the country. It is vicious, and there is a systematic pattern behind it."

On May 29, thousands of Christians marched in New Delhi to protest what they believed to be the authorities' inattention to the attacks. The group presented a message to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, expressing sadness "at the silence of the government on whom we look for support in meeting the gravest challenge facing our community."

"We are supposed to be citizens of this country," Pastor Robin Bihans from Punjab state told Ecumenical News International. "But when attack after attack is reported regularly, we feel we are second-class citizens." ❧

- VIII. Bring guilty motorists and their victims together, at the appropriate time, so that they can undergo the liberating experience of forgiveness.
- IX. On the road, protect the more vulnerable party.
- X. Feel responsible towards others. 📷

Malaysian Court Blocks Woman's Attempt to Convert

On May 30, the Malaysian Federal Court rejected an attempt by a Muslim woman to legally convert to Christianity in order to marry her Christian fiancé.

In a 2-1 decision, the court ruled that Lina Joy, a 43-year-old woman baptized as a Christian in 1998, was required to produce a declaration from a Muslim court that she was no longer a Muslim before the word "Islam" could be removed from her identity card. Such a change would be required by Malaysian law before Ms. Joy could marry a Christian, as interfaith marriages are illegal in Malaysia.

Joy has refused to submit to an Islamic court, claiming the court has authority only over Muslims. According to Islamic law, she could be sent to prison for abandoning the faith.

"The Federal Court has not only denied me [the right to convert], but [has denied it] to all Malaysians who value fundamental freedoms," said Joy.

On June 19, a "Note of Protest" was distributed by leaders from five minority religious groups in Malaysia. The statement urged Malaysian governmental authorities to take measures to prevent "personal tragedies" like the Joy case.

"The decision reflects a growing trend where civil courts are renouncing their responsibility of providing legal redress to individuals who only seek to profess and live their religion according to their conscience," said Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing, Chairman of the Christian Federation of Malaysia.

Joy is entitled to ask for a review of the court decision. If accepted, the case would be heard by a panel of five or seven judges. 📷

Iraqi Christians Under Attack

A series of attacks and abductions of Christian leaders in Iraq has some members of the minority community worried about the future of the faith in the war-torn nation.

"Members of all religions—including both Islam and Christianity—are suffering now in my country," said Archbishop Jules Mikhail Al-Jamil of the Syrian Catholic Church. "But Christians as a minority are in greater danger of seeing their historic churches disappear."

In May, Father Nawzat Hanna of the Chaldean Church was abducted in Baghdad as he left the home of a sick parishioner. His captors demanded a six-figure ransom in U.S. dollars, but later released the priest despite the church's inability to pay. Hanna reported having suffered "a little bit" of torture.

Another Chaldean priest, Father Hani Abdel Ahad, was kidnapped in June with four church members while moving some of his personal materials to a seminary in Baghdad. Ahad was released on June 17. It is unclear if a ransom had been paid to secure Ahad's release, but Chaldean Bishop Shlemon Warduni acknowledged that the kidnapping was the result of religious and financial considerations.

In all, at least seven Chaldean priests have been abducted and released in Baghdad since the beginning of 2007.

On June 3, Father Ragheed Ganni and three deacons from his church were murdered by unidentified gunmen in Mosul. Ganni had previously complained of threats, and his parish had been bombed eight days prior to his assassination.

Thousands of Christians have fled Iraq in response to attacks from Muslim extremists. An estimated 500,000 Chaldean Christians remain in Iraq, down from nearly 1.5 million in 2000. "If the political situation does not change, at the end of the century there will be no Christians left in Iraq," said Al-Jamil. "Many are now seeking refuge in Syria or Lebanon, hoping to reach Europe or America."

Pope Benedict XVI has expressed concern for the shrinking numbers of Christians in Iraq. "Christian families and communities are feeling increasing pressure from insecurity, aggression, and a sense of abandonment," he said. "Many of them see no other possibility than to leave the country and to seek a new future abroad." 📷

UNDER ATTACK A priest touches the face of a fellow Chaldean Catholic priest who was kidnapped and killed in Mosul.



Church News

NCC Supports Gay Pride Fest

Claiming to represent its 35 member denominations with their 45 million members, the National Council of Churches (NCC) signed up as a “collaborating nonprofit organization” for a week-long homosexual “pride” celebration in Philadelphia in May. The website for this “Equality Forum” boasted that it included “[p]erformances by sexy and steamy NY go-go dancers,” a group specializing in “balls out rock n’ roll striptease and cabaret,” and “a drag king revue.”

NCC General Secretary Bob Edgar presided over the week’s “Interfaith Service” at historic Christ Episcopal Church. Edgar delivered a rambling sermon, the theme of which seemed to be: “I think God today is calling us to notice the stains, when people are spilled on.”

The NCC has no official position on homosexual practice, which almost all of its member communions oppose. However, Edgar and other staffers have repeatedly expressed their own pro-homosexuality convictions. “I do not—repeat, *not*—believe that there is anything unhealthy or unclean about homosexuality or homosexual people,” the general secretary stated in his book *Middle Church*. He expressed his hope that “our society ends its discrimination against homosexuals and embraces them with love.”

Homosexual Activists Target Surgeon General Nominee’s Religion

President Bush’s May 24 nomination of Dr. James Holsinger to be the next U.S. Surgeon General has drawn vehement protests from gay rights groups. Without otherwise challenging Holsinger’s professional qualifications, they have focused their criticisms on his activities within the United Methodist Church.

As a member of the denomination’s Judicial Council, Holsinger has upheld the United Methodist Church’s historic and democratically confirmed teaching

Gender-Bending Methodist Minister Stirs Controversy

The Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church made headlines with the announcement that one of its ministers was undergoing medical treatment for a sex change. The Rev. Ann Gordon now identifies herself as male and has legally changed her name to Drew Phoenix.

Delegates to the regional body’s 2007 annual conference session in May, where the minister publicly announced this development, were given no opportunity to vote directly on the matter. Bishop John Schol declared his full support for Gordon/Phoenix, who remains a minister in good standing. Her Baltimore church, whose services attract fewer than 50 people, is part of the “Reconciling” movement, whose stated mission is to “enable full participation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life of the United Methodist Church, both in policy and practice.” Bishop Schol has been an outspoken ally of that movement.

The case of Gordon/Phoenix will be reviewed by the denomination’s Judicial Council in October. However, the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* does not specifically address transgendered pastors. Therefore, this issue will likely come before the church’s next quadrennial General Conference in April 2008.

AMBIGUITY The status of the Rev. Drew Phoenix (until last fall, the Rev. Ann Gordon) remains uncertain, as the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* does not address transgendered pastors.



that sexual relations should occur only within the marriage of one man and one woman. In 1991, as a member of the denomination’s Committee to Study Homosexuality, he wrote a paper for the church’s General Conference summarizing the health risks associated with the practice. A third cause for complaint against the Surgeon General nominee has been his role in starting a congregation strongly committed to reaching out to homosexuals without compromising biblical teaching on sexual morality.

These kinds of church involvements have made Holsinger “the worst kind of bully in the United Methodist Church,” according to Troy Plummer, the non-Methodist leader of the denomination’s main pro-homosexuality caucus, the Reconciling Ministries Network.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which calls itself “America’s largest civil rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and

transgender equality,” was especially incensed by the fact that, in his paper for the General Conference, Holsinger “compared reproductive organs to plumbing parts and he seems to believe homosexuality is a ‘lifestyle’ choice that should be ‘cured.’” Soon after HRC and other gay rights groups demanded that senators reject Holsinger’s nomination unless he repudiated his religious views on sexual morality, Democratic presidential candidates Barack Obama, John Edwards, Christopher Dodd, and Hillary Clinton released statements echoing their criticisms, with the latter promising to vote against the nominee.

In a press release, IRD’s UMAction Director Mark Tooley warned that “[t]he demands from these radical critics have far-reaching implications; among them, that potential office holders should be disqualified merely for holding traditional Christian or Jewish beliefs.” Such a religious test, excluding perhaps the

majority of the U.S. population from public office, would be “the ultimate in bigotry,” according to Tooley. 📖

UCC Leaders Retreat from Diversity

John Thomas, President of the 1.2 million-member United Church of Christ (UCC), has now publicly confirmed that the much-vaunted “tolerance” and “diversity” of the denomination’s liberal leadership is in reality very limited. A June 12 article in the *Carroll County Times* of Westminster, MD, paraphrased Thomas as saying that “the denomination needs to start seeing itself less as a big tent and more as a parade heading in a certain direction and marching to a certain drumbeat.” Furthermore, “[s]ome of the tolerance toward dissenting groups needs to end, he said.”

Two years ago, Thomas denounced evangelical leaders within his denomination as “serpents in our midst.” But delegates to the UCC General Synod in June sent a mixed message. They took no action on a resolution discouraging such “rhetoric that fuels hostility and misunderstanding towards those whose theological persuasion is different than a Conference or General Synod Resolution.” On the other hand, they adopted a resolution urging “fair representation of all points of view in all settings of the United Church of Christ.” But the delegates stripped from this last resolution all references to “evangelical, conservative, orthodox, or traditional” beliefs being welcomed “alongside liberal and progressive points of view.” 📖

Evangelical Leaders Condemn Anti-Catholic Bigotry

A group of national evangelical leaders has endorsed a statement “condemn[ing] the grotesque anti-Catholic bigotry that is now on display as a result of the Supreme Court’s recent decision upholding the constitutionality of the federal law prohibiting partial-birth abortion.” Of particular concern was a *Philadelphia Inquirer* cartoon “depicting the five justices who formed the majority in the case wearing Catholic bishops’ mitres.”

The statement declared that “[j]ust as Pope John Paul II acknowledged past injustices committed by Catholics, or committed in the name of Catholicism, against Protestants, Jews, and others and pledged to work against any revival of these injustices, we acknowledge past Protestant prejudices” against “[o]ur Catholic brothers and sisters” and “pledge to fight against the anti-Catholic bigotry we are now witnessing.”

The statement condemned “the moral abomination known as partial-birth abortion” and exhorted “our fellow Protestant Christians of every denomination—including those denominations that do not share our view that the life of the child in the womb must be honored and protected by law—to join with us in condemning the new anti-Catholicism that has, in the aftermath of the partial-birth abortion decision, reared its ugly head.”

The statement invited “groups that present themselves as enemies of prejudice, including ‘Americans United

for Separation of Church and State,’ to join with us in condemning the *Philadelphia Inquirer* cartoon and other manifestations of anti-Catholic bigotry.” This “time of testing for them” would reveal “whether their claim to oppose prejudice and bigotry is an honest one or mere hypocrisy.”

IRD President James Tonkowich explained that he endorsed the statement to advance the “new ecumenism” that is really “the true and ancient ecumenism—an ecumenism built on the Truth of Jesus Christ”—and is rapidly replacing “the old, big-institution ecumenism of the mid-20th century.”

Other endorsers included Gary Bauer of American Values, Chuck Colson of Prison Fellowship Ministries, Southern Baptist Convention President Frank Page, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, megachurch pastor Rick Warren, Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association, and Wendy Wright of Concerned Women for America. 📖

Outrageous Quotes

“Islam has a far better record than either Christianity or Judaism of appreciating other faiths.”

Author Karen Armstrong, fellow of the theologically liberal Jesus Seminar.

“I would like to suggest that we have to start reading the Bible backwards.... We begin with Revelation, not with the pristine garden. But then, reading backwards with the saints of all times and places, we discern the possibility for a new beginning—we reach towards a new genesis, a new way of living in harmony with the earth....”

The Rev. Janet Parker, pastor of Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ in Arlington, Virginia. Parker was the winner of the National Council of Churches’ first Environmental Sermon Award.

“... I agree with both [Islam and Christianity] because I do want to say that Jesus is unique, and for me, Jesus is my spiritual master. Muslims say Mohammed is the most perfect. Well, it depends on who you fall in love with.... I was following Jesus, and he led me into Islam, and he didn’t drop me off at the door. He’s there, too.”

The Rev. Dr. Ann Holmes Redding, speaking on her dual role as practicing Muslim and Episcopal priest (for more, see “Picture Perfect: A Muslim/Episcopal Priest” on page 18). Redding is a professor of theology at Seattle University.



Re-creation Not Restoration

IRD President James W. Tonkowich testifies to Congress on the environment.

by James W. Tonkowich

The following is an edited version of the testimony of IRD President James Tonkowich to the Environment and Public Works Committee of the United States Senate, Thursday, June 7, 2007.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my testimony. Most of the IRD's constituents are evangelicals who are members of the so-called "mainline" Protestant churches. They are involved with the IRD in part because they feel misrepresented by their denominational Washington offices and by

groups like the National Council of Churches.

This morning I would like to address two concerns regarding global warming. The first is the positive valuation of human population and human development.

The second is the importance of not foreclosing debates that should remain open.

Since the biblical story begins in a garden, it is tempting to think that the story will end with the garden restored. In fact, recently National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) Vice President for Governmental Affairs Richard Cizik told *Newsweek* that he feels that

God is saying, "...with my help, you can restore Eden." The thought is tempting, but biblically and theologically, it's nonsense.

In the final analysis, the Bible is not a story of restoration. It's a story of re-creation. Eden will never be restored. Instead something better will happen: all things will be made new with an unexpected twist. The grand story that began in a garden ends in a city. This final city, the New Jerusalem, descends out of the New Heavens to its place on the New Earth.

First, a city is a complex of artifacts. Walls, doors, windows, paving stones, foundations are fashioned out of quarried stone, lumber, glass, and metal.

The Bible values humans as makers who take the raw material of creation and create. In fact, the creation is incomplete without human activity shaping it. Even in Eden there was no call to maintain the Earth as an unpopulated wilderness area. The Bible sees human beings, human procreation, and human industry as positive goods.

Second, a city is a habitation for people, many people—people who belong on the Earth. "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the Earth" (Genesis 1:28). This, as it turns out, is in contrast with much if not most environmentalist thinking.

For example, last year the Texas Academy of Science named ecology professor Eric Pianka of the University of Texas its "Distinguished Texas Scientist" for 2006. In his acceptance speech Pianka said the only hope for Earth is the death of 90 percent of its human inhabitants. His remarks were greeted by what

In the final analysis, the Bible is not a story of restoration. It's a story of re-creation.

FROM THE GARDEN TO THE CITY (ABOVE) Even some evangelical environmentalists make the mistake of believing that we can restore Eden.

one observer called “loud, vigorous, and enthusiastic applause”—presumably by people who think they’re part of the ten percent.

Now logically, you can support schemes for climate control without supporting population control, but for many environmentalists the two are inextricably linked. After all, since people use up natural resources, release carbon dioxide, and otherwise pollute the environment, fewer people means less harm to the environment. So, to save the Earth, we have to reduce the human population. And that assumption is creeping into the thinking of some Christians.

For example, the foundational document of the Evangelical Environmental Network states that environmental “degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe.” What solution is there to this problem except population control?

Karen Coshof who produced the film “The Great Warming”—a film enthusiastically endorsed by some evangelical leaders—said after the film’s release: “Population is the underlying problem—the catalyst for the whole thing, but we didn’t get into that in the film. That is the underlying problem—too many people—all in competition for the same resource.”

NAE Vice President Richard Cizik told an audience at the World Bank: “We need to confront population control and we can—we’re not Roman Catholics after all—but it’s too hot to handle now.”

Yet population control, which nearly always includes abortion on demand, is abhorrent to most evangelical and Catholic Christians.

The problem is not population. It’s how to create just, peaceful, educated societies in which people can use and develop technologies to meet their needs. And in order to do that we must make sufficient quantities of inexpensive

energy available to the global poor—something believers in catastrophic global warming are unwilling to do for fear of global warming.

And it is not just a matter of withholding energy from those who need it. According to the Congressional Budget Office, cap-and-trade policies advocated by many will disproportionately hurt the poor.

Solutions to an environmental problem that will trap the poor in their poverty are not solutions. An ethical environmental policy must elevate human beings, lifting them from poverty and pollution. Wealthier is healthier for humans and for the environment.

The second concern I want to raise is over the debate about global warming. “Debate?” someone may ask, “What debate?” That is exactly the problem.

Solutions to an environmental problem that will trap the poor in their poverty are not solutions. An ethical environmental policy must elevate human beings, lifting them from poverty and pollution.

Recently at a moderated discussion between evangelicals on both sides of the global warming issue, one side presented facts, arguments, and questions while the other, those who believe in catastrophic global warming, responded with nothing but bald assertions. When pressed, one participant—as if on cue—reverted to an *ad hominem* attack on his opponents. He then went on to simply assert that he believes whatever the scientists tell him because there is a scientific consensus. But there is no scientific consensus.

Consider the questions that need to be answered:

- How is the climate changing?
- What are the causes?
- What is the likely extent of future change?
- Is it better to adjust to climate change or attempt to prevent it?
- What measures, if any, would prevent climate change?
- How much would such measures

cost and would the benefits be worth the potentially massive cost?

In my reading of the literature and listening to the debate, I have not seen consensus on any of those questions.

The kind of radical fideism that some evangelical Christians are exhibiting toward catastrophic global warming is a betrayal of science, since science is not about voting. Science is about facts, interpretations of those facts, and conclusions that either align with reality or don’t. Scientific consensus has been wrong before and it will be wrong again. Thank God for skeptics. They have saved millions of lives.

Declaring that the debate is over is also a betrayal of the Christian intellectual tradition. Christians have always relied on faith and reason to understand

the world. We test would-be authorities by the light of faith and reason. We ask hard questions—particularly when the livelihoods and lives of

the poor are at stake.

For Christians, stewardship of God’s creation is non-negotiable. Environmental issues deserve a well-informed and thoroughly Christian response. That response must be one that thoughtfully considers all the scientific evidence and eschews a public relations campaign of endless repetition. Further, we must refuse the dangerous misanthropy of modern environmentalist ideology. We must take an approach that, by contrast, promotes a culture of life and that affirms that humans and human activity are valuable, worthy, and, in fact, indispensable in God’s good plan for this good Earth. ■



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

Differing Views at the June 7 Senate Hearing

John Carr, Secretary of the Department of Social Development and World Peace, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

"The U.S. Catholic Bishops insist, at its core, global climate change is not simply about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressure. Rather, global climate change is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those generations who will succeed us. If we harm the atmosphere, we dishonor our Creator and the gift of creation.

"This old-fashioned virtue [of prudence] suggests that we do not have to know everything to know that human activity is contributing to climate change with serious consequences for both the planet and for people, especially the poor and vulnerable. Prudence tells us that we know that when a problem is serious and worsening, it is better to act now rather than wait until more drastic action is required....

"Third principle: priority for the poor. We should look at climate change from the bottom up. The real inconvenient truth is that those who contribute least to climate change will be affected most and have the least capacity to cope or escape. The poor and vulnerable are most likely to pay the price of inaction or unwise action...."

The Rev. Dr. Jim Ball, President of the Evangelical Environmental Network

"We see today a growing number of religious and national leaders, including last week President Bush who acknowledged recent scientific reports that the human contribution to climate change is virtually certain. This human contribution makes concrete action to reduce global warming pollution an inescapably spiritual act....

"Some evangelical leaders have not yet joined in this campaign, but today, it is clear that to be concerned about global warming is recognized as a distinguishing characteristic of new evangelical leadership coming to the fore....

"The Evangelical Climate Initiative's call to action statement makes four basic claims. First, human-induced climate change is real. We believe the science is settled, and it is time to focus on solving the problem....

"...we believe that in the U.S., reductions [of carbon emissions] on the order of 80 percent by 2050 will be necessary. We should solve the problem by harnessing the power of the market and by protecting property rights. We support a cap and trade approach. In our special concern for the poor, we also urge Congress to make sure that any climate policies are not regressive...."

The Rev. Dr. Russell Moore, Dean, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Southern Baptists and other like-minded conservative evangelicals are for environmental protection, of course, for the stewardship of the earth. Our views of the universe, that the material world was created as an inheritance for Christ, that man was given dominion over the Creation and that the cosmos itself will be renewed in Christ at the end of the age mean that we cannot hold an economic libertarian, utilitarian view of the earth and its resources.

"This does not mean, however, that evangelicals are united in tying the Biblical mandate for creation care to specific legislative policies to combat global warming. Indeed, last year's meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution warning against the use of the Bible by some religious groups to support some of the proposals of the secular environmentalist movement.

"[O]ur difficulty is with tying the Biblical mandate to specific public policy proposals, proposals that are not, of course, mandated by Scripture, and with ramifications that are not yet fully known. This is further complicated when national political leaders, including recently the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, point to evangelical global warming activism as a means to mobilize the evangelical vote. Southern Baptists and other evangelicals do not deny that there is climate change, or even that some of this climate change may be human-caused. Many of us, though, are not yet convinced that the extent of human responsibility is as it is portrayed by some global warming activists, or that the expensive and dramatic solutions called for will be able ultimately to transform the situation....

"Southern Baptists and other like-minded evangelicals are not opposed to environmental protection. But we also understand that divine revelation does not give us a blueprint for environmental policy. We have no pronouncements on what Jesus would drive, except that the Scripture seems to indicate that the next time we see Him, He will be driving neither a Hummer nor a hybrid. We are sure, though, that he would call us to protect the earth, to care for the poor, to protect innocent human life. And we are concerned that tying Bible verses to any specific legislation on global warming, especially when there are potentially harmful results, could serve both to harm the public interest and trivialize the Christian gospel."

See also "The Presiding Bishop Goes to Washington," on page 20, for coverage of testimony by Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori at the same hearing.

GBCS Goes to Court over Methodist Building

by Mark D. Tooley

The United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), after several years of controversy and preparation, has filed a motion in the Washington, DC, Superior Court seeking greater discretion over the Methodist Building Endowment Trust Fund. The terms of the trust, established in 1965, restricted the principal and income derived from the valuable Methodist Building on Capitol Hill (with related assets) exclusively to address “temperance and alcohol problems.”

But the GBCS chair, Bishop James Swanson of Knoxville, reported that the board was asking the court for a declaratory judgment allowing the fund to be used for broader political purposes.

He made this announcement at the spring 2007 GBCS board meeting, held in late April in Washington, DC. At stake are millions of dollars in income from the Methodist Building and stock assets. GBCS gets at least 40 percent of its annual income from building rental income and stock appreciation.

Meanwhile, the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, at its June meeting, overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling upon GBCS to comply with the “purpose stated in the Trust and use Restricted Funds for the work on temperance and alcohol related problems.” The resolution complained that GBCS had not “followed either the letter of the trust or the spirit of its founders as it has expended a large portion of the funds from the trust (approximately \$2 million annually) on items and programs not in accordance with the requirements of the trust.”

The Methodist Building was originally constructed in 1924 to house the denomination’s Board of Temperance. That board accumulated millions of dollars in assets, in the form of the building and other real estate and stocks, through donations from temperance-minded Methodists concerned about the ravages of alcohol abuse. In 1965 the Board of Temperance turned over the building and related assets to what would become the Board of Church and Society, with the proviso that those holdings be devoted exclusively to the “temperance and alcohol problems” which had been on the hearts of the original donors.

But for the past four decades the GBCS, with its offices in the Methodist Building, has used tens of millions of dollars in income from the Building Trust to fund its general activities. These include lobbying the U.S. government for a pacifist foreign policy, an expanded welfare state, liberalized immigration, stricter

environmental and other regulations, abolition of the death penalty, making “sexual orientation” a special category protected under anti-discrimination law, and a host of other left-leaning causes. Anti-alcohol work has not figured prominently in the Methodist lobby group’s efforts, even though that was the purpose to which the trust was dedicated.

Bishop Swanson explained that GBCS wants a court ruling that would not only permit continued usage of the trust funds for broader political purposes, but which would also retroactively validate GBCS’s past use of the funds for activities not related to alcohol problems. “We have filed this [legal motion] to make sure we are doing what is proper,” he said. The bishop, noting that “this [trust fund issue] has continued to consume a lot of time and energy of our staff,” affirmed that “we believe that this [a favorable court ruling] will help us.” He and other trustees of the fund hoped that such a ruling would mollify some Methodists who have voiced concerns over whether the funds were being used for purposes outside of the donors’ original intents.

But judging from the Western North Carolina resolution, controversy over the Methodist Building Endowment Fund Trust is not likely to fade any time soon, no matter how the D.C. Superior Court rules. The resolution quoted the United Methodist *Social Principles*, which affirm “our long-standing support of abstinence from alcohol as a faithful witness to God’s liberating and redeeming love for persons” (*Discipline*, ¶ 162J). It further

quoted the United Methodist *Discipline*, which specifically says about GBCS assets: “Funds vested in any of the predecessor boards shall be conserved for the specific purposes for which such funds have been given.”

The Western North Carolina resolution concluded: “Accountability in the use of all funds should be a guiding principle within the church.” A ruling on the Methodist Building Endowment Fund Trust is expected from the D.C. Superior Court later this year. ☐



BUILDING BATTLE The controversy over the UM General Board of Church and Society’s violation of the Methodist Building Trust is unlikely to subside any time soon. (IRD/John Lomperis)



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



Sojourners Hosts Democratic Presidential Candidates at 'Pentecost 2007'

by Rebekah M. Sharpe

On June 5, participants in Sojourners' "Pentecost 2007" conference gathered near the U.S. Capitol for their "Vote Out Poverty" rally. There, protesters chanted, "Vote Out Poverty!" and "Justice, Justice!" One could wish that eliminating poverty were so easy a task that mere ballots could accomplish it.

At the rally, Sojourners/Call to Renewal chief Jim Wallis explained, "We are people of faith, and we are connecting our faith [to political activism]..." Adam Taylor, Sojourners' director of campaigns and organizing, stated, "I believe that Jesus had some politics... it's pretty clear from Scripture that Jesus was a partisan for the least of these!"

Wallis' campaign translates biblical mandates to care for the poor in ways far more congenial to one party than to the other.

Many evangelical political activists have understood that "the least of these" includes unborn children, need-

ing protection against abortion, and young children in families, needing the care of a mother and a father married to one another. But the emerging "evangelical left" has endeavored to turn attention away from these efforts to oppose abortion and preserve marriage.

Instead the focus has been on issues of "social justice"—meaning, redistribution of income through government taxation and entitlement programs. At the

June 4 Sojourners/Call to Renewal-sponsored Democratic presidential candidate forum, government solutions to poverty were central. Wallis, who has stated his organization will hold a similar forum for Republicans this fall, rejoiced, "We no longer have a two-issue conversation about faith and politics."

All Agreed on 'the Great Moral Issue of Our Time'

To prove Wallis' point, the three invited candidates spoke extensively about poverty, which former senator John Edwards called "the great moral issue of our time." Edwards told the audience that he had committed to "eliminating poverty over the next 30 years." He offered a laundry list of agenda items: "Making work pay, having a living wage, making sure that workers can organize themselves into unions, having decent housing for families that don't have it, having true universal health care, helping kids be able to go to college..." Senator Barack Obama said that to fight poverty, one of his "major commitments would be to make sure that we're expanding early childhood education ... that starts before pre-K, zero to three."

Senator Hillary Clinton offered her own set of commitments to the crowd. On the Iraq War, Clinton stated: "If I had known then what I know now about how President Bush would use the authority that he was given, I never would have voted to give it to him" She said her goal was to get the United States out of Iraq as soon as possible. Clinton also addressed healthcare: "I think we could get almost unanimous agreement that having more than 45 million uninsured people, nine million of whom

GETTING RELIGION? (ABOVE) John Edwards, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama join Sojourners chief Jim Wallis (second from right) on stage at "Pentecost 2007." (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

are children, is a moral wrong in America ... and then we would have to start doing the hard work of deciding what we were going to do to make sure that they were not uninsured."

All three candidates devoted considerable time to addressing their personal faith. And they all received a warm reception from the religious left audience. It remains to be seen whether Sojourners will promote a Republican candidates' forum with equal enthusiasm, or whether its audience will welcome the Republicans with the same affection.

A Campaign to 'Vote Out Poverty'

Earlier in the Pentecost conference, emerging church guru Brian McLaren spoke of trends in 20th century American Christianity, saying, "There were two main religious options: civic religion [which existed as a religious support to nationalism, according to his view]... and withdrawing into religious subculture.... [Those who chose the second option] were interested in personal righteousness and not social righteousness." McLaren said this situation changed when Martin Luther King, Jr., "open[ed] up a third option... [that] unlike civil religion is willing to speak truth to power and tell the government [it was wrong]."

Asbury Seminary professor Chuck Gutenson suggested that progressive Christians could face the danger of becoming too closely aligned with government. "One can embrace political activism because you trust politics to solve the problem, or one can embrace political activism because God intends public institutions to look a certain way." Gutenson admitted that "our [progressives'] use of Scripture is often very slipshod. Many times ... you get the impression that someone has already arrived at the conclusion... and then said, 'Okay, now what scripture can I link this with?'"

However, it is not so much the religious left's expansion of the political agenda that troubles many fellow evangelicals. While the dilution of the current pro-life and pro-family agenda may be one concern, the proclivity to reach for utopian, government-centered solutions seems at least equally disturbing and divisive. In its "Covenant for a New America," Sojourners' policy strategy

states, "We believe that government at all levels—local, state, and federal—has an important role...."

The document further contends, "It is time to end the bitter debate between big or small government." Apparently, Sojourners would resolve the debate in favor of big government. The document's "Social and Government Responsibility" section asserts, "Health care is a human right.... There are a variety of ways to achieve this goal, and we have a moral obligation to achieve it."

The "Vote Out Poverty" campaign seeks to "put poverty on the national agenda during the 2008 election AND mobilize people of faith around legislative priorities." The conference-attendees-turned-amateur-lobbyists were charged with making three specific "asks" during their later visits to congressional offices. Mary Nelson of the Sojourners Board of Directors simplified these legislative requests: "Welcome the stranger, end hunger now, and cover all children."

In policy terms, these asks advocated an immigration policy that would offer a "path to citizenship for undocumented [illegal] immigrants" and would not employ a point system "favoring wealthy, highly skilled immigrants." They also called for reauthorization of two federal healthcare programs, with a \$50 billion funding increase over the next five years. Finally, trainers urged the activists to request that the government "shift [farm] subsidies to nutrition [food stamps], conservation, rural development, and alternative energy development."

Standing against 'George W. Jeroboam'

It is unclear how these domestic policies are the sole conclusion at which modern American Christians could arrive upon reading biblical passages. But for similar unexplained reasons, Sojourners understands that being a Christian also means that you are against all use of military force—particularly the U.S. intervention in Iraq.

A corollary to this pacifism is that all government defense spending is presumed to be evil. Consequently, it was unsurprising when Freddie Haynes, who otherwise delivered a tremendous, theologically sound

sermon on Amos 5:24, declared, "It's downright insane that by the end of this year we will have spent \$500 billion on an unjust ... illegal war." Haynes added, "We are called on as Christians to do what makes sense in this crazy world." He jokingly identified the king of Amos' time as "George W. Jeroboam" and warned of "prophets that are on the [king's] payroll."

The pacifist message was affirmed at an Emerging Leaders Dinner for participants under thirty, sponsored by Eastern Mennonite University, which holds to the pacifist Anabaptist tradition. There, following a message from Shane Claiborne, the founding partner of a "radical faith community," attendees prayed a "Litany of Resistance and Confession." Written by a member of Claiborne's community who had entered and later fled military service, the litany called for God to, "Forgive us, for we know not what we do" because of "our Caesars and our Herods." God was called on to "deliver us" from the sins of "arrogance of power ... hysteria of nationalism ... avarice of imperialism ... idolatry of national security ... profanity of war."

'Will God Help Us?'

Earlier that day, as the rally closed, one speaker detained the eager new protester/lobbyists from their work with a final rallying chant. He called, "Can we do it [achieve our three policy goals]?" The crowd resoundingly affirmed, "YES!" Next the speaker shouted, "Will God help us?" The crowd shouted back, "YES!"

Will God help us serve the poor, because in serving the least of these, we serve Christ? Yes. Will God help us secure billions of dollars in new spending for federal entitlement programs? That seems a more dubious question—one in which we mortals might observe some caution before answering definitively on behalf of the deity. ☒



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PAKISTAN

‘Mere Christianity’ in Pakistan

by Faith J.H. McDonnell

Christians in the Islamic world frequently live with oppression and degradation. In Pakistan, these conditions constitute the normal legal status for Christians, who are *dhimmi*. The *dhimmi*, or “protected people,” in Islam are the “People of the Book,” non-Muslim monotheists such as Jews and Christians.

Rather than being “protected,” Pakistani Christians are disadvantaged in every way. They live with grinding poverty. They are treated as second-class citizens. They

Rather than being “protected,”
Pakistani Christians are
disadvantaged in every way.

are deprived of education and of employment opportunities. Many Christians are street sweepers, surrounded by dung and debris every day. Christians also hold the most dangerous jobs, working unprotected in hazardous conditions. In 2006, three Christian sanitation workers were killed by poisonous gases when they were forced to enter a sewage gutter without any protective clothing, masks, or gas detectors.

Other Pakistani Christians spend their lives by a blazing kiln in a brickyard. According to a report by Jubilee Campaign USA, whole families labor, but wives and children are not paid. The employer pays a “despicably low” wage to the husband. Jubilee Campaign adds

that typically 50 percent of the wage is withheld under the pretense that it is applied to the family’s debt. Families work for more than 12 hours each day, seven days a week, for less than 1,800 rupees (approximately \$30) per month.

In addition to the oppression of dhimmitude, being a Christian in Pakistan is as precarious as walking through a minefield. Each day, Pakistani Christians’ lives are threatened with theoretical landmines of hostility and irrationality because they are Christians.

General Pervez Musharraf’s government seems unable to stop the violence and terrorism waged against Christians by militant Islamists. And increasingly there seems to be no help for Christians in Pakistan’s parliament, the National Assembly. Pro-Taliban political parties are pushing legislation oppressive to Christians. On May 8, 2007, the National Assembly rejected a bill to provide just, equal treatment for all under the blasphemy laws, which now punish only those who dishonor Mohammed or the Koran. A few days later, the Assembly gave first approval to an apostasy bill demanding death for men who leave Islam and life in prison for women converts. Interestingly, just days later, Christians in the town of Charsadda, near Islamabad, received anonymous threatening letters. The letters promised death to “infidels” who do not convert to the “true Muslim faith.”

In Charsadda, police provided protection. But local authorities are not always helpful when Islamists attack Pakistani Christians. On June 17, 2007, dozens of Muslim men armed with axes and sticks attacked a group of Christians preparing for an evangelistic service at the

PROTECTED? (ABOVE) Meena Masih’s husband, Younis, was sentenced to death for blasphemy after filing a police report concerning an attack by Muslims which nearly killed him. He had simply asked his neighbor to turn down loud music. (Courtesy All Pakistan Minorities Alliance)

Salvation Army in the Punjab province village of Chak 248. According to Compass Direct News, the mob seriously injured seven Christians, desecrated the church, and destroyed many books. But police refused to file charges against the perpetrators until a delegation of 50 Christians from the village, with their lawyer, lobbied the district inspector general. According to the attorney, Khalil Tahir Sindhu, the case named less than half of the attackers, and it failed to charge the mob with illegal trespassing and religious hatred. Sindhu believes that the attackers also should have been charged with terrorism, because many of the Christians of the village have been forced to flee.

A common “landmine” terrorizing Pakistan’s Christian community is the malicious and arbitrary use of the country’s blasphemy laws. Many Christians have been charged with blasphemy against Mohammed or with desecration of the Koran, crimes punishable by death. Only an accusation is needed for a case to be filed. According to Group Captain (Rtd.) Cecil Chaudhry, Executive Secretary of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA), “The laws require absolutely no evidence, and no proof of intent.... They are a tool in the hands of extremists to threaten and destroy the lives of anyone they disagree with.” Although no

Christian yet has been executed for blasphemy, some have been killed in prison or while awaiting trial.

Three recent blasphemy cases demonstrate the threat facing Christians in Pakistan. In 2005, Christian Younis Masih angered a Muslim neighbor whom he had asked to turn down the Islamic music he was playing. Younis had made the request because his family and friends were gathered to mourn the death of his one-year-old nephew. The next morning, local Muslims ransacked the homes of Christians and nearly killed Younis. When Younis and his wife attempted to file a police report, the unfortunate man was charged with blasphemy. On May 30, 2007, Younis was sentenced to death by the sessions court in Lahore. An appeal is being planned, but Younis continues to face very risky conditions in prison.

In another case, a young Catholic man, Sattar Masih, was arrested on blasphemy charges in Kotri, Sindh province, on April 13, 2007—a day before he was to be married. During Friday prayers, an imam accused the Christian of leaving a paper in the mosque’s donation box inviting Muslims to come to his house and learn the truth about Mohammed. The imam showed Sattar’s photo and address to a mob of Muslim worshipers, who then stormed Sattar’s house and tried to kill him. Police

intervened, but allowed the attackers to go free. They took Sattar to jail, where the prospective groom was tortured into making a false confession.

APMA chairman Shahbaz Bhatti condemned the irrationality of the charges. “How could any sensible person write those words against the prophet and then leave name and photo, when he knows that punishment of such an act is death?” he demanded. In addition, Sattar could not have written the paper, as he is almost totally illiterate.

A final example of the many pending Christian blasphemy cases took place on June 1, 2007. Six Christian women—four student nurses, a nursing instructor, and the principal of the School of Nursing at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences—were suspended and accused of desecrating the Koran. According to APMA, a Koranic verse posted on a bulletin board was found crossed out with a pen. The principal was on leave when the incident occurred, and there is no evidence that any Christians were involved. But Muslims, including pro-Taliban *madrasa* students, held a protest against the Christians on June 1. Since that time, the Christians have been harassed and threatened with kidnapping and killing by the Islamists while charges are pending.

Christians in Pakistan know that life would be easier if they converted to Islam. But they choose to follow Christ. It is no coincidence that many Pakistani Christians have the same surname. They have chosen to be known as “Masih,” which means “blessed one” or “Christ.” And they know that choosing to be a Christian in Pakistan may be choosing death. In worship, Pakistani Christians sometimes sing with one hand on their throat to signify that they are willing to die for Jesus. They would say that they are merely Christians, but mere Christianity is heroism in Pakistan. 📖

NONSENSE APMA chairman Shahbaz Bhatti recounts the story of Sattar Masih, who was tortured by police into confessing to blasphemy against Mohammed. (Courtesy All Pakistan Minorities Alliance)



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Picture Perfect: A Muslim/Episcopal Priest

An Episcopal priest who claims to be both Muslim and Christian demonstrates the current status of the Episcopal Church better than any words could ever say.

by Ralph A. Webb

Just when you thought that things could not get stranger in the Episcopal Church, along comes an Episcopal priest who also considers herself to be a Muslim.

The Rev. Ann Holmes Redding of Seattle, WA, made her profession of faith in Islam in March 2006. Formerly on the clergy staff of the Diocese of Olympia's St. Mark's Cathedral, she now is adjunct faculty at Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry. Her dual faiths were first reported in the June 2007 diocesan newspaper *Episcopal Voice* and then brought to national attention in the June 17 *Seattle Times*.

The Rev. Ann Holmes Redding made her profession of faith in Islam in March 2006.

The story appears to have caught the denomination off guard. Episcopal Church Center employees reportedly told the *Seattle Times* that

Redding was the first example of a clergyperson of dual faiths of which they were aware. (However, 2-½ years earlier, a flap had arisen over a clergy couple who were also practicing Wiccans.)

So in the apparent absence of any formal guidelines, the Episcopal Church Center staff not surprisingly opted to go both inclusive and local. They said that such clergy can serve at the diocesan bishop's discretion. The Rt. Rev. Vincent Warner, Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia, reportedly accepts Redding's dual faiths. In July, however, Bishop Geralyn Wolf of Rhode Island—the diocese in which Redding was originally ordained and remains canonically resident—announced that she was suspending Redding's priestly privileges for a year of “reflect[ion]

on the doctrines of the Christian faith, her vocation as a priest, and what I see as the conflicts inherent in professing both Christianity and Islam.”

Wolf's action commendably was both pastoral toward Redding and cognizant of the seriousness of the matter. Nevertheless, the inhibition was Wolf's own response to Redding's dual faiths and did not reflect any standard at the denominational level. Consequently, the dual faiths issue proved reminiscent of the Episcopal Church's “local option” for same-sex blessings—only without the official recognition granted such blessings by a 2003 General Convention resolution.

Still, no one either at the denominational level or among prominent Episcopal clergy touted dual faiths as the next frontier of inclusivity and local option. After being inhibited, Redding told the *Seattle Times*, “the last thing the church needs to deal with at this time is this type of doctrinal dispute.”

Redding's longstanding questioning of the Christian faith and opposition to some of its core doctrines may have proven too controversial at a time when the Episcopal Church is attempting to improve its public relations image. She does not believe in original sin or the Trinity. And while Christianity holds Jesus to be both fully divine and fully human, Jesus, for her, is a prime example of a life devoted to God, but no more divine than any other human being. And both Jesus and Mohammed are authoritative examples for her. “I just am not willing to put all those ‘onlys’ in front of all those affirmations about Jesus,” Redding remarked to *Episcopal Voice*.

And in the diocesan newspaper, she compared the emphasis placed on the creeds by some Christians to

“fraternity hazing—you have to say these words in order to be part of the club.” In questioning the importance of even saying the creeds, Redding may be more liberal than many progressive Episcopalians. Indeed, the few progressive bloggers who wrote concerning Redding generally expressed concern over her statements.

The minimal response was particularly ironic given the prominence given by progressives to the Episcopal Church’s baptismal covenant. At the end of the baptismal service in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, the congregation welcomes those who have been baptized with these words: “[c]onfess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.” Islam denies both Christ’s crucifixion and his resurrection.

Given such vast differences, the idea that a person can become a Muslim while remaining an Episcopal priest in good standing trivializes both faiths. While Wolf’s action suggests the possible limits of inclusion, her colleague Warner’s professed support of Redding’s syncretism represents inclusion run amok.

The Bigger Picture

Redding’s approach to Christian faith illustrates the Episcopal Church’s stance toward the Anglican Communion. Just as Redding views her conversion to Islam as a “calling ... very much ... about my identity and who I am supposed to be,” the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church recently told the Anglican Communion, “in truth the only thing we really have to offer [to the communion] is who we are.”

This statement came from a letter that the council issued near the end of its June 11–14 meeting in Parsippany, NJ. In the letter, the Executive Council describes the denomination as a “community” of sincere Christians seeking God’s will who “cannot tell our brothers and sisters with certainty ... where the Holy Spirit will guide this Church.” But without a radical turnabout, the Episcopal Church seems set in the heterodox directions exemplified by its stands on gay and lesbian “inclusion” taken over

the last four years:

- “Who we are”—the church that consented to the consecration of Gene Robinson as bishop and approved same-sex blessings as a local option, despite the 1998 Lambeth conference that upheld normative Anglican teaching concerning sexuality and marriage.
- “Who we are”—the church that proceeded with the consecration even when many primates had warned that doing so would “tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level.”
- “Who we are”—the church whose House of Bishops in March of this year identified gay and lesbian rights as an essential part of its “gospel.”
- “Who we are”—the church that continues to ignore the requests of the primates as same-sex blessings continue at the local level.

And the council concludes its letter with these words: “We believe [t]he Episcopal Church can only offer who we are, with openness, honesty, integrity, and faithfulness, and our commitment never to choose to walk apart.”

Implicitly, the council is arguing for the Episcopal Church as a local option in the Anglican Communion—a local option that is free to pursue its own path and continue to go against the mind of the larger communion.

Of course, the council does not want the Episcopal Church to “walk apart” from the Anglican Communion in the sense of consciously choosing to disassociate from the communion. (Orthodox Anglicans hold that the Episcopal Church already has “walked apart” in practice, by departing from Scripture and traditional Anglican teaching and by failing to heed the rest of the Anglican Communion.) Doing so would mean a loss of both worldwide influence and mission.



But neither does the council want the Episcopal Church to curb its sense of progressive justice. There is no mention in the council’s letter of any change for the good of the larger body of Christ. The best that the council offers is an assurance that “[t]he advice of the larger community will continue to find reflection in the actions we take.” But when has the Episcopal Church ever truly heeded the primates’ “advice,” much less their “requests”?

The end result of this identity crisis seems to be a church where almost anything can go at the local level, a church that pursues (from its point of view) ever-new revelation from God without the boundaries historically maintained by orthodox faith and practice. It is a church where, as seems true for the Rev. Ann Holmes Redding, a conviction of an individual call from God trumps the understanding and faith of the wider body of Christ. Under such circumstances, both Redding and the idea of dual faiths as a local option for Episcopal clergy provide a picture-perfect illustration of the Episcopal Church’s own identity quest, a quest consumed with “who we are.”



Ralph A. Webb is the Director of the Anglican Action program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

The Presiding Bishop Goes to Washington

by Ralph A. Webb

In March, Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori told the church's Executive Council that she hoped to visit Washington, DC, regularly "to do the advocacy work that I think is crucial in this day and age." She indeed came to Capitol Hill on Thursday, June 7, to testify concerning global warming to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. (See pp. 10-12 for testimony of IRD President James Tonkowich and others at the same hearing.)

The bishop's testimony, which she made on behalf of the National Council of Churches (NCC) as well as the Episcopal Church, not only spoke to the issue at hand but touched upon deeper theological and political principles. She gave glimpses into her understanding of God's vision for humanity, revealing a theology that many orthodox Anglicans would find problematic. And she looked con-

fidently to progressive political diagnoses and prescriptions, which many conservatives would doubt.

Overarching Vision

Jefferts Schori, who was one of seven religious leaders on the panel, reiterated some familiar, overarching themes of her tenure as presiding bishop. She spoke of "the vision that God has for us to realize in our own day ... a vision in which all human beings live together as siblings, at peace with one another and with God, and in right relationship with all of the rest of the creation." This was a recasting of her "dream of God"/"coming home" themes so prevalent in her investiture sermon and other speeches.

If there was any difference this time around, it was that the bishop made the arguably utopian claim that this vision could be "realize[d] in our own day." In the past, as at the Episcopal Urban Caucus' February 2007 meeting, she has sometimes stressed that such goals would be realized only over a much longer period of time. This more modest expectation seems more in keeping with the orthodox Christian understanding that God's kingdom will come only in God's time.

Troubling Theology

Jefferts Schori also spoke out of a progressive worldview in affirming "the God whose revelation to us is continual and ongoing." She apparently was not talking about

continued human insights into God's fixed revelation, a process that orthodox Anglicans (e.g., the late Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey) have upheld and orthodox Christians of all stripes have accepted. These kinds of discoveries certainly occur as we study the general revelation of God that can be seen in the created world, and also perhaps as we study the special revelation of God in the Scriptures. But the bishop seemed to be suggesting—though not directly stating—something more: that no aspect of God's revelation is fixed. This is an increasingly popular view among Episcopal progressives.

Arguably even more troubling was the influence of feminist theologian Sallie McFague on Jefferts Schori's thought. Jefferts Schori approvingly cited McFague's description of "creation as the Body of God." It is important to note that McFague has not used this pantheistic-sounding phrase in a literal sense. Rather, as progressives are wont to do, the theologian sees both this description and other ones used by Christians about God (including those found in Scripture) as metaphors describing peoples' experiences of God.

But while orthodox Anglicans agree that many metaphors are found in Scripture, they believe that even such comparisons are inspired by God and communicate infallible truth about God; the metaphors are not simply descriptions of peoples' experiences with God. Significantly, the biblical authors do not describe creation as "the Body of God." The apostle Paul speaks instead of the Church as the body of Christ in the world.

Furthermore, many such images that progressives take as metaphors, orthodox Christians take more literally. McFague, however, sees what she calls metaphors as limited by time and place; she dismisses scriptural images of God as king, shepherd, et al., as no longer relevant for today. She also describes one critical attribute of God, his sovereignty, as a metaphor inappropriate for today.

McFague asserts that "the world as God's body ... suggests ... that embodiment in some fashion be extended to God"—a view that orthodox Christianity has always denied, save, of course, regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Her understanding would impact how we look at both God's attributes and our mission on earth. According to McFague, "the incarnate God is the God at risk—we have been given central responsibility to care for God's body, our world." While she takes pains to assert that God could not, in reality, be destroyed (and therefore is not "at risk" in an ultimate sense), the

Jefferts Schori looked confidently to progressive political prescriptions, which many conservatives would doubt.

metaphors still deviate greatly from an orthodox understanding of a sovereign, transcendent God wholly other from his creation.

So while Jefferts Schori's reference to "creation as the Body of God" does not necessarily signify a New Age belief, it does illustrate the considerable differences between progressive and orthodox Anglicans in their understanding of the Scriptures, God, and a myriad of other subjects. McFague's influence may have extended to the emphasis that the presiding bishop places on the "interconnectedness" of everything in the world, since that is another of the feminist theologian's themes.

Debatable Public Policy

Jefferts Schori warned at the committee hearing that, in her view, "[t]he crisis of climate change presents an unprecedented challenge to the goodness, interconnectedness, and sanctity of the world." But while she spoke of these attributes of God's creation as imperiled, and therefore possibly contingent, she expressed great confidence in human scientific theories and policy proposals related to global warming.

Jefferts Schori added that "the answer is known and the solution is clear. We must reduce carbon dioxide emissions. . . . the solution is simply good leadership and vision." She also claimed that "[t]he scientific community has made it clear that we must reduce carbon emissions globally by 15 to 20 percent by the year 2020 and by 80 percent by the year 2050 in order to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change."

The presiding bishop provided several suggestions on how to achieve this goal:

- Help middle- and lower-income citizens "take advantage of new technologies," either through tax incentives or a cap-and-trade system of carbon emissions quotas.
- Provide tax incentives to help middle-

and lower-income citizens with higher energy costs.

- Completely fund and, if necessary, expand the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.
- Develop new technologies, renewable energy sources, and other solutions.
- Use technology to help poorer countries adapt to climate changes.

The presiding bishop did not identify any religious authority, beyond her personal political judgment, that determined these policy prescriptions. Nor did she provide suggestions as to how costs would be funded or speculate on what other social priorities might not receive funding as a consequence.

Jefferts Schori did recognize that other Christians differ with her over how to solve

While Jefferts Schori spoke of God's creation as imperiled, and therefore possibly contingent, she expressed great confidence in human scientific theories and policy proposals related to global warming.

any real or potential problems associated with climate change. However, she also spoke of "[t]he scientific community" as if reputable scientists were of one mind on the entire matter. To fellow Christians who were unconvinced (including, presumably, some Christian scientists), she did not offer fresh evidence. The bishop recounted the Church's house arrest of Galileo as a negative example of "the Church's moral failure" in not accepting the conclusions of science. Consequently, she implored "my colleagues in the faith community who doubt the urgency of addressing global warming, . . . to re-consider for the sake of God's good earth."

The Conservative Response

Jefferts Schori's religious perspective was not the only one heard by the Senate committee. Others who testified disagreed with her on some, but not all, points. IRD President James Tonkowich, historian and

author David Barton, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Dean Russell Moore all affirmed Christian environmental responsibility. All accepted that the climate is changing—whatever the causes or the degree of such changes might be. Tonkowich and Moore advocated helping the poor gain access to more advanced technologies so that they can cope better with environmental problems.

But the more conservative panel members did differ from Jefferts Schori and the other members of the panel (John Carr, Secretary of the Department of Social Development and World Peace for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; the Rev. Jim Ball, President of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN); and Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center) in several areas:

- The scientific evidence—The conservatives stressed a diversity of views among scientists about many aspects of the problem.
- The urgency of the matter—The conservatives counseled greater caution before taking actions that might have major economic repercussions.
- The general solution—Tonkowich, in particular, argued that giving the poor the tools of self-sustaining economic development would likely be more effective than government-imposed mandates constricting development.

Jefferts Schori, then, did not differ from conservatives on whether to care for the environment or help the poor, but how best to do that. On that latter issue, there are substantial differences between politically conservative and politically liberal Christians. ☞



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Presbyterian Israel Divestment Unlikely Soon

by James D. Berkley

Israel divestment has had its ups and downs as the activist *cause du jour*. In 2004, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) divestment resolution grabbed the spotlight and extensive unfavorable publicity. But in 2006 better instincts prevailed, and Presbyterians divested themselves of the 2004 resolution.

Now, as of June, the group ultimately tasked with recommending any divestment of stocks to the PCUSA General Assembly had nothing to suggest. The Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) met in Chicago June 1 and 2. While at times it displayed notable bias against Israel,

for now it favored further conversations with corporations operating in Israel, rather than divestment.

MRTI is an elected group tasked with keeping the denomination free from morally tainted investments. Most Presbyterians know next to nothing about it.

However, MRTI has served

to slow the headlong Presbyterian rush toward divestment, preferring to engage corporations and then possibly make a divestment suggestion only as a last resort. Even then, actual divestment would require General Assembly approval.

In addition, even if General Assembly should vote to divest, the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation would never tell their investment

fund managers to divest a stock immediately, due to fiduciary responsibility to the investors. At most, either organization would instruct its managers not to purchase any more of the stock and to unload current shares gradually.

A Good Turn Not Taken

General Assembly's step away from divestment in 2006 dropped the PCUSA from the cast of radical organizations collaborating to isolate Israel politically and economically as an "apartheid" pariah state. The Assembly instead urged "that financial investments of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, be invested in only peaceful pursuits...."

General Assembly specifically directed MRTI to ensure that its strategies reflect "commitment to positive outcomes" and "awareness of potential impact upon the stability, future viability, and prosperity of both the Israeli and Palestinian economies." MRTI, however, seemed to hear only full speed ahead on its ongoing corporate engagement process, which the Assembly had also approved.

Contrary to the General Assembly's explicit directives, MRTI has relentlessly sought only one party's welfare—that of the Palestinians. At the June meeting, not a positive word was said about Israel, nor kindly motive ever imputed to the Jewish state. There was no talk of investing in Israel, only Palestine. Israel, to hear MRTI speak, was considered unremittingly evil in intent and criminal in its actions.

Contrary to the General Assembly's explicit directives, MRTI has relentlessly sought only the welfare of the Palestinians.

No Way Out?

At one point in the Chicago meeting, MRTI member Lynwood Battle noted that Motorola Corporation had been recognized nationally as one of the best corporations for its social responsibility. Could MRTI be barking up the wrong tree in engaging Motorola for possible divestment? MRTI wouldn't say.

But then again, once a corporation gets on MRTI's engagement list, there doesn't seem to be a tidy way to get off. Citigroup, for instance, got added in for balance. Four other companies supposedly abetted Israeli wrongdoing, and Citigroup added one corporation that ran afoul of MRTI for purportedly aiding terrorist Palestinians.

The problem is that Citigroup had already identified and cut off any possible indirect financial links to terrorists. It had a system that forbade such operations, and the system worked.

So, how could Citigroup have any cleaner hands? Wouldn't one think that MRTI might vindicate Citigroup?

Not yet. Although such a move was hinted in the docket, a question about voting to take Citigroup off the list was quickly quelled. "There's no recommendation on Citigroup," interjected MRTI staffer Bill Somplatsky-Jarman, and the question was abruptly dropped.

Lawsuit Stifles Talk

It appears that MRTI will not even be in conversation with Caterpillar Corporation (another of the five targeted for engagement regarding the Middle East). Caterpillar can't talk now.

The family of Rachel Corrie, an American college student crushed to death in Gaza when she placed herself between an Israeli bulldozer and a building it was starting to level, is suing Caterpillar in Washington State. The Corrie family considers Rachel's death

premeditated murder and is attempting to hold Caterpillar responsible for supplying the equipment.

Apart from the merits of the suit and Caterpillar's possible liability, the suit has essentially removed Caterpillar's ability simply to sit down and talk about the situation. Any corporate legal counsel would be quick to demand that management say nothing about the situation until the Corrie lawsuit is settled. Even if Caterpillar would prefer to be in conversations with MRTI, it would be unable to do so. The lawsuit has precluded further discussion.

An MRTI Crystal Ball

Out and out divestment in regard to

Not a positive word was said about Israel, nor kindly motive ever imputed to the Jewish state. There was no talk of investing in Israel, only Palestine. Israel, to hear MRTI speak, was considered unremittingly evil in intent and criminal in its actions.

Israel looks to be some time off, if ever. When asked if MRTI is likely to recommend any actions or just issue a status report for General Assembly in 2008, Somplatsky-Jarman replied, almost defensively: "It will be a status report of what has transpired since the last Assembly. We are not under any mandate to make any recommendations ... but to work on the issues."

MRTI member Gary Skinner concurred. "It's not our goal to divest or to even ask the Board of Pensions to divest," he reasoned. "Our goal is to engage in constructive dialogue, to the end that a forty-year tragedy of human relations in the Middle East will begin to be turned around for the sake of all the people there."

Were actual news of imminent divestment to arise soon, however, it would more likely involve corporations operating in Sudan. In 2006, General Assembly gave fast-track permission to

MRTI to suggest such divestment to the General Assembly Council (GAC) for its approval and implementation. Normally, only the General Assembly can approve divestment, but due to the urgency of the situation, the Sudan situation would be unique.

The problem is that neither the Board of Pensions nor the Presbyterian Foundation owns any stock in corporations operating in Sudan—a fact that the General Assembly must not have known when it authorized a divestment process. In fact, the corporations remaining that do operate in Sudan tend to be state-controlled corporations from places like China or North Korea. Such companies are largely immune to shareholder pressure or consumer boycotts.

That situation left MRTI in somewhat of a dilemma. It didn't want to appear passive to a General Assembly mandate, yet there is little it could say or do, given the circum-

stances. The decision was a little fuzzy. Bill Somplatsky-Jarman will compose a statement to the effect that MRTI heard from the Board of Pensions and the Foundation that they have no stocks to divest, but that MRTI does believe there are significant human rights violations in Sudan. In addition, he will look into some second-tier companies operating in Sudan that might be worth engaging.

Final approval of the statement, which will go to the next General Assembly Council meeting prior to the next MRTI meeting, will have to come through e-mail correspondence—an inopportune venue for conducting business intended for open meetings. ■



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

In Search of Staff Accountability

by James D. Berkley

Any organization such as a mainline denomination needs to operate not by idiosyncratic whim of the hired personnel, but rather by policy legitimately established to reflect the purposes of the organization. Presbyterians in particular are known for doing things “decently and in order.” Thus, loose cannons and tinhorn radicals sometimes need to be lashed down by leaders held accountable to manage the denominational staff.

Recently in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Associate for Women’s Advocacy—Molly Casteel—stepped out of line by printing articles in direct defiance of a resolution approved by General Assembly in 2006. This is the kind of transgression calling out for her supervisor to make it clear that such defiance of legitimate authority simply will not be countenanced.

An Act of Defiance

Casteel initially posted problematic essays related to Women’s History Month on the denominational website. One essay appeared to hail the sexual revolution of the 1960s as liberating for women. “Feminism has opened the door for important conversations about women’s freedom of expression and personal fulfillment,” the essay argued. “Twens and teen girls need to be equipped with skills to empower them to exercise their freedom of conscience.”

Nowhere did this essay suggest that the conscience of a Christian teen ought to be guided by biblical teachings on marriage and sexuality. Another piece on the website recommended resources depicting Christianity as oppressive to women, and arguing that women fared better in pagan societies that worshipped female deities.

The organization Voices of Orthodox Women (VOW) took exception to the essays and asked Casteel repeatedly for a response. Finally, Casteel replied in early June.

Casteel’s response was uncompromising and unapologetic. The controversial articles were “intended to stimulate discussion and to challenge the readers,” she told VOW. “Your response indicates that we were successful.” Casteel brushed off VOW’s concerns about biblical teachings on sexuality with the assertion that “faithful persons disagree” on these matters.

“We seek to be open to the whole church,” Casteel wrote, “which means that sometimes, we will be challenging to an always-changing small number much of the time.” Evidently, she discounted VOW (and others who support biblical teachings) as among the “small number” that she had offended. By contrast, the PCUSA staffer likened herself, and other radical feminists challenging

traditional Christian teachings, to “the faithful women” who witnessed Christ’s resurrection.

Direct Opposition to GA Instructions

But most disconcerting is that Casteel’s dismissive reply came despite a 2006 General Assembly resolution that directs “the General Assembly Council (Congregational Ministries Division) and all other PC(USA) entities to use the biblical and confessional teachings that sexual relationships belong only within the bond of marriage of a man and a woman as the standard for the development of any future materials or recommendations for materials in print or in its website.”

How ironic that this General Assembly definitely intended to prevent exactly the kind of material that Casteel posted or commended on the denominational website! Commissioners labor under the expectation that their decisions can alter problematic practices. Staff members cannot be allowed simply to defy such direction. When it happens, someone needs to lower the boom!

Groups like VOW or Presbyterian Action ought to be rendered unnecessary by offices and staff members faithful and competent in what they do. But instead, VOW, Presbyterian Action, and others must play a vital watchdog role.

And why should it be that when VOW made a well-documented case, asking distinct questions that deserved a prompt and thoughtful answer, Casteel didn’t praise the group for an obviously needed corrective? Instead, Casteel’s tardy reply missed the point, dodged key questions, and consisted of grandiloquent, patronizing vapor.

There comes a time for supervisory correction. A denomination cannot accommodate freelancing mavericks in positions of influence and authority. When General Assembly makes a decision, staff members must comply.

Should staff members such as Casteel feel unable in good conscience to comply, their supervisors need to make it clear that they are welcome to take their advocacy someplace else, where the organization authorizes such views. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), however, isn’t such a place. 📧



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Presbyterian News

A Really Crass “Religious” Coalition

In late May, the pro-abortion rights group that calls itself the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) issued a press release. One sentence in the press release pretty well highlighted the RCRC’s central failure to propound essentially Christian belief rather than crass political opinion. Here is what the Rev. Carlton W. Veazey, President of the RCRC, claimed:

... the continuous political attacks on abortion have obscured the single most important concern for the woman with an unwelcome pregnancy: making a decision that is right for her and her family.

But wait! For a Christian, shouldn’t the single most important concern be making a decision that is right with God?

Totally depraved as we are, there is no end to the ways we can rationalize and justify doing things that supposedly are “right for us,” but are instead both harmful to us and others and an affront to God.

God wants what is right for us, which can hardly be the killing of unborn babies created in God’s image.

Three Presbyterian entities support the RCRC: Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options, Women’s Ministries, and the Washington Office. It is long overdue to pull support from a totally politicized, morally bankrupt, abortion-at-any-cost outfit like the RCRC. ☞

No Good, Very Bad Statistics

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues its free-fall tumble downward in membership. The latest statistics indicate a now-routine loss of 46,544 members in 2006. That’s a two percent decline in one year, following recent losses of 43,175 in 2004 and 48,474 in 2005. Presbyterians now number 2,267,118, cut nearly in half from the high-water mark of 4,254,597 in 1965.

Andy Moye, a General Assembly commissioner from Georgia, noted that in 2006 there were “8,297 adult baptisms, which is about ¾ adult per church.” That means scant evangelism is going on in most churches! Moye expressed it starkly: “It seems like a waste of energy to have 11,000 churches to spread the good news to 8,000 people.”

The Office of the General Assembly had used a worst-case scenario of a loss of 85,000 members in 2006 to figure the per capita budget for General Assembly approval last summer. Then in March, Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick partially blamed “a decline in overall church membership” for the unexpected need to cut an additional \$750,000 and 11 percent of his staff. With actual losses now registering far short of the projected 85,000, Kirkpatrick has some explaining to do. ☞

Stated Clerk Foggy on FOG

In 2008 the PCUSA General Assembly will have the option to toss the current Form of Government (FOG) and adopt a slimmed-down, specifics-lite, entirely new version being rewritten by a FOG Task Force. And Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick has twice gone fuzzy on preparing Presbyterians to make that decision.

First, without Presbyterian Action Director Jim Berkley pointing it out, Kirkpatrick would not have noticed that any presbyteries submitting overtures to the 2008 General Assembly will face the confusing situation of maybe needing to amend the current FOG or maybe the proposed FOG, depending on which wins



CRASS COALITION The Rev. Carlton Veazey, president of the RCRC, at the March for Women’s Lives in 2004. (IRD/John Lomperis)

approval by GA and, later, the presbyteries. So how should they word their amendment overtures?

Asked in winter, Kirkpatrick finally responded inadequately in late spring, advising presbyteries to write overtures for the old FOG and trust the Advisory Committee on the Constitution to reword them correctly for the new FOG. Or, one could wait until January 2008 and hope to hastily write and pass an amendment for the finalized FOG draft just before the February 22 deadline for submission. Still a confusing plan!

Second, Kirkpatrick is defying the General Assembly stipulation that the FOG Task Force release its draft by September 1. The Assembly meant to give the church ample time to respond, but Kirkpatrick has inexplicably ruled that the task force can rework its draft until the February deadline. He hopes for its release, however, by the end of 2007.

A Stated Clerk does not have the authority to countermand a General Assembly resolution. ☞

Religious, Secular Activists Rally Against Israel

by John S.A. Lomperis

On June 10, hundreds of boisterous activists for the Palestinian cause marked the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day Mideast War of 1967. With many church groups participating, and one prominent United Methodist official among the speakers, the activists rallied on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol.

According to emcee Phyllis Bennis, this event was a part of an “international day of protests” around the world “for boycotts, sanctions, and divestment” against Israel. Speakers hurled harsh imprecations against the Jewish state, whose destruction some of them favored. Extreme theories of Zionist conspiracies were peddled from the podium. There were few, if any, criticisms directed at Palestinian leaders.

Activists from official and unofficial Roman Catholic, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Church of God (Anderson, IN), Mennonite, Quaker, and ecumenical groups demonstrated alongside such groups as the International Socialist Organization and the United States Green Party.

The event was sponsored by two leftist umbrella coalitions, United for Peace and Justice and the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. The latter’s steering committee includes United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries official David Wildman and the Rev. Diane Ford Jones of Every Church a Peace Church. The Rev. Dr. Fahed Abu-Akel, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), serves on its advisory board.

These church leaders apparently exerted no moderating influence. All of the speakers treated Israel’s victory in the 1967 war as a disaster. None acknowledged the complexities of the situation: that in 1967 Israel was responding to its Arab neighbors’ massing of troops in a bid to annihilate the Jewish state, and that today

Israel still faces threats to its existence from Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists sponsored by Syria and Iran. While a few of the speakers declared they held no ill will toward the Israeli people, such occasional expressions of nuance were relatively sparse.

Israel’s “illegal and immoral occupation” of the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem was consistently denounced as “racist and brutal” and flying “in the face of everything we stand for as human beings.” Israeli security



SIGN LANGUAGE Protesters were quick to label Israel’s actions as “terrorism,” but were dismissive of decades of attacks by Palestinians on Israeli civilians. (IRD/John Lomperis)

concerns were glibly dismissed.

Mazin Qumsiyeh of the Palestinian American Congress dreamed of “a post-Zionist society.” While claiming that such a new nation would include Jews “who do not believe in exceptionalism,” he gave no hint of what would happen to mainstream Jews who did believe they were a chosen people.

Israel was repeatedly identified with apartheid South Africa. Its behavior was also compared to the Holocaust, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and genocide against Native Americans. Afif Safieh, chief of the Palestine Liberation Organization’s Mission to the United States, charged that slavery and genocide were the “shared values” that formed the basis of the “strategic partnership” between the United States and Israel.

According to Andy Shallal of Iraqi

Voices for Peace, Israel brazenly disregards Palestinian lives and the authority of the United Nations “while the U.S. and its allies sit on the side taking their marching orders from Tel Aviv.” America and Israel are allegedly plotting a new world order in which “Israel continues to terrorize the region” and anyone who opposes the twin powers “will be crushed.”

Kyung Za Yim, national President of United Methodist Women (UMW), was the most prominent church official to

speak. Yim boasted that she was “proud to be here” alongside such anti-Israel radicals, that her group was a founding member of the U.S. Campaign, and that “many United Methodists from across the country” had come to this protest. “We are here to demand that the U.S. end its military, economic, and corporate support of Israel’s illegal occupation!” she thundered.

Yim reported that UMW will be “educating” thousands of church women about the conflict this summer. She went on to give an incomplete quote from

the United Methodist Social Principles, misrepresenting her church as a pacifist denomination. Based on this rhetorical sleight of hand, the United Methodist Women leader vehemently “oppose[d] any U.S. military action against Iran” and “urge[d] the withdrawal of all U.S. troops and U.S.-funded mercenaries in Iraq.”

The church-supported rally concluded with a performance by a foul-mouthed Arab hip-hop group and a march to the White House, past a sizeable contingent of counter-protesters. ■



John S.A. Lomperis is a Research Associate for the UMAAction program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

Answering Calls (God's and Yours)

by Ingrid K. Mitchell

I have been blessed to work at the Institute on Religion & Democracy since last October. If you have called the office recently, it is more than likely that I have spoken with you. I am currently serving as the receptionist and administrative assistant. I hope that I have directed your call to the appropriate staff. And if it has not worked out, I am sorry, please forgive me.

Before March 2006 I was not familiar with the IRD. My first introduction was a conversation I had with my friend Jonathan Tonkowich while studying at Thomas Aquinas College in Southern California. He told me his father was interviewing with an organization that was working for church renewal, in far-off Washington, DC. It never occurred to me that seven months later I would be working here.

Since graduation in May 2006, a number of surprising things have happened. Since January 2006, Jonathan and I have been working on setting up and maintaining a national pro-life event, the Wash for Life. Coming into its second year, we are hoping to have youth groups from all 50 states participating. On one day in September, they all will hold car

washes to benefit their local pregnancy care centers. Last September we had 3,000 young people raise a total of \$85,000 in 41 states. We hope that these numbers will double in the coming year. Our success always has been and remains in the Lord's hands. Please keep the date, September 15, in your prayers, or check our website (www.washforlife.org) to see if there is a car wash near you.

It was during this time of preparation and work for the Wash for Life that I became more familiar with the IRD. The Tonkowiches were hosting the Wash for Life team, and every night at dinner we would talk about the work of the day. Jim would tell us about how things were going at the IRD office. We heard about the changes and major events in the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as well as the forming of a new strategic plan for the Institute. I am a cradle Catholic, and I had never heard of most of the issues amongst the mainline denominations. It was fascinating. Also, the organizational advice that Jim gave to us was invaluable to our Wash for Life project.

So when I was looking for a job after the first Wash for Life was over, I was

delighted to be hired by IRD. It has been a wonderful experience working here. I have learned so much about the ins and outs of the non-profit world. But I have also enjoyed working in an intellectual setting and what I feel is the stronghold of conservative and orthodox thinking.

Since graduating I am realizing, more and more, the difficulty of applying biblical teaching to the judgments we have to make as voting citizens. So for me working with the staff at IRD has been such an education in how to begin my political understanding of the issues with Christian integrity. Also, the guidance that IRD gives to the churches to help members and leaders avoid the political pitfalls that would take them farther from the faithful is invaluable. The IRD speaks to the whole person, as a political, social, and intellectual creation. I feel very blessed to have had the chance to work for the gifted people here at IRD. ☒



Ingrid K. Mitchell is an Administrative Assistant at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

Support the IRD through your IRA

In 2006, Congress enacted new tax incentives for charitable gifts. The IRA Charitable Rollover provision allows individuals to make distributions from their IRA accounts directly to the IRD without recognizing the distribution as income. Key points of the provision are:

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Contact David Sheaffer, 202-904-6195, davids@ird-renew.org.


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