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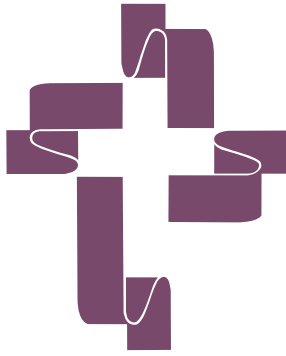
Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

December 2007

Keith Pavlischek:

Human Rights in an Age of Terror

A Critical Look at the Evangelical Declaration Against Torture



The Institute on Religion & Democracy

1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202.682.4131
Fax: 202.682.4136
Web: www.ird-renew.org
E-mail: mail@ird-renew.org

The Institute on Religion & 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 and Anglican Communion, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The IRD also sponsors the Church Alliance for a New Sudan and the Liberty Initiative for North Korea.

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VOLUME 26 NUMBER 5

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As part of our Legacy League you will continue receiving literature from the IRD, even if you don't have discretionary income to send regular support.

IRD's
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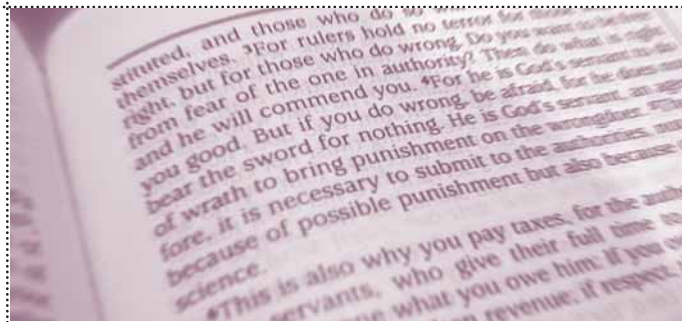


Contents

Features

10 **Human Rights in an Age of Terror** by Keith Pavlischek

The recent Evangelical Declaration Against Torture adopted by the National Association of Evangelicals fails to come to grips with the proper moral and political distinctions that Christians have struggled with throughout the ages.



14 **Fusion for Freedom** by Faith J.H. McDonnell

The joining of the Chinese house churches with pro-democracy intellectuals creates a powerful force for transformation in a China still hostile to Christian belief and practice.



18 **The Political Victory of Katharine Jefferts Schori?** by Ralph A. Webb

Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori steered the House of Bishops through politically choppy waters, giving no ground on the Episcopal Church's past actions.



Contents

5	From the President: We Believe..... James. W. Tonkowich
6	International Briefs
8	Church News
17	African Bishop Emphasizes Centrality of Christ in Healing Society. Rebekah M. Sharpe
26	2007: A Year of Success for IRD. by David P. Shaeffer
27	IRD Diary: A Door Closed, a Door Opened Nalani E. Hilderman

Anglican Action Ralph A Webb

18	The Political Victory of Katharine Jefferts Schori? Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori steered the House of Bishops through politically choppy waters, giving no ground on the Episcopal Church’s past actions.
20	Health Expert Urges Bishops to Support Government Advocacy and Relief Efforts Over Private Initiative Dr. Paul Farmer argues that churches should eschew privately run relief efforts in favor of those managed by governments.

Presbyterian Action James D. Berkley

22	A Mixed Message From Elias Chacour Father Elias Chacour attempts balance in his presentation on the Israel-Palestine Conflict—but leaves out important context to the conflict.
24	Presbyterian Leaders Confirm IRD Emphases A straw poll reveals that church leaders’ opinions about the role of the national church and its agencies are remarkably similar to the counsel Presbyterian Action has given for years.
25	Presbyterian News

We Believe...

by James W. Tonkowich

Sometimes people ask whether the IRD, an ecumenical alliance of Christians, has a statement of faith. In fact, we do. And it is the most ecumenical statement of all: the Nicene Creed. The creed is accepted as a summary of Christian belief by faithful Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Christians and has served the Church well since AD 381.

During Advent, we can appreciate the creed's affirmation of the dual nature of Jesus Christ, that he is wholly God and wholly human. Regarding his deity, the creed says:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.

Those who wish to affirm that Jesus was “a prophet” or “a great teacher” without also affirming that he is Sovereign God and Creator, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, are excluded by the creed.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

But the creed doesn’t stop with the affirmation that Jesus is Lord and God. It goes on to speak of his humanity.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

It is this event in time and space that we celebrate this month. And we can strip Christmas of its secular and commercial trappings if we call it the Feast of the Incarnation instead. God became one of us. As St. Athanasius, who was central to the history of the Nicene Creed, wrote in *On the Incarnation*:

...the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.

Athanasius goes on to say that Jesus did not take on human flesh simply for the sake of revelation: “Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father.” In the words of the Creed:

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

The cradle without the cross is a false message. Jesus joined in our common human life so that he might die an uncommon human death—one death for all so that all might have life. Over the manger looms the shadow of the cross and beyond it the new dawn of Easter. And yet, as one lay observer notes, most sermons,

...can be summed up in the assurance that we’re all wonderful and we’d be even more wonderful if we recognized that everyone else is wonderful too. I don’t want to exaggerate, but sometimes I have to wonder why Christ had to become man and suffer and die and go through all that agony because of our sins.

This is true in the Catholic Church (the observer is a Catholic), in the Protestant mainline, and, increasingly, in much of the evangelical world. Crisp, clear Nicene orthodoxy has fallen victim to skeptical criticism of the Bible, romantic notions of human goodness, the politicization of the Gospel, and the pragmatism and cheap grace often found in the church growth movement.

Nonetheless, as Athanasius wrote:

The things which they, as men, rule out as impossible, [Christ] plainly shows to be possible; that which they deride as unfitting, His goodness makes most fit; and things which these wisecracks laugh at as “human” He by His inherent might declares divine.

These are truths that will ultimately triumph when the babe of Bethlehem returns as the King of Glory.

May the season of Advent fill you with joyful anticipation of his coming and the Feast of the Incarnation renew you in the hope of everlasting life. ✚

Jim Tonkowich



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

International Briefs

Dutch Church Leader Apologizes to Pentecostals

Expressing remorse for past stereotypes, the general secretary of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands has offered an apology to Pentecostal Christians in the country.

“Just as some people regard Muslims nowadays, enlightenment thinkers held you in contempt and viewed you as backward,” said the Rev. Bas Plaisier at a ceremony honoring the hundred-year anniversary of the Pentecostal movement. “Even now, one can still sense an attitude of negativity and condescension.”

According to a report by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research, membership in Dutch Pentecostal and evangelical churches increased three-fold between 1970 and 1990. An estimated 140,000 Pentecostals now live in the Netherlands, attending more than 600 Pentecostal churches.

The first Pentecostal church in the Netherlands was established in Amsterdam in 1907.

Plaisier noted that in the past, those who opted to leave the established Protestant churches were viewed to have committed a mortal sin, and that features of Pentecostal worship such as prophesying and speaking in tongues were viewed as the work of the devil.

“I hope that with this centenary celebration we can put an end to this way of speaking and thinking about one another,” said Plaisier. ☞

Church Leaders Unite to Fight Gambling in Philippines

Roman Catholic, Protestant, and evangelical leaders in the Philippines are joining forces to oppose illegal gambling, in an attempt to reduce the corruption of governmental officials and students in Baguio City, Ecumenical News International reports.

City councilor Galo Weygan, an

evangelical Christian lay leader, claimed in an August 13 speech that military and civilian officials were protecting those organizing high-stakes wagering, and turning a blind eye to other forms of gambling—a claim dismissed by city leaders.

“We church leaders should help Weygan, whose life is in danger as he takes the frontline in raiding well-protected gambling dens,” said the Rev. Simplicio Dang-awan Jr. of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Palestinian Christian Killed in Gaza

The manager of a Christian bookstore in the Palestinian territory of Gaza was found dead on October 7, one day after his apparent abduction by Muslim extremists.

The body of Rami Ayyad was discovered by police on a street in Gaza City near his store, The Teacher’s Bookshop. The 29-year-old Palestinian man had been shot in the head and stabbed multiple times. Palestinian security officials and eyewitnesses have reported that Islamic gunmen publicly beat Ayyad prior to his assassination, accusing him of spreading Christianity.

The bookshop, operated by the Palestinian Bible

Society, had been the target of previous terrorist attacks. In February 2006, two small pipe bombs were detonated outside the bookshop, destroying the business’ façade. Two months later, the store was bombed again, destroying much of the building’s first floor.

“There’s very little security left for Christians in Gaza,” a Christian worker told Compass Direct News. “[Christians] are in a state of shock. They can’t believe this happened. There are signs that say this is not going to get better.”

“The staff at the Palestinian Bible Society work against a constant backdrop of violence and conflict,” said James Catford, Chief Executive of the British and Foreign Bible Society. “They face the threat of attack daily. But they are dedicated to demonstrating the Bible’s life-changing message to the Palestinian people.”

The Interior Ministry of the Hamas leadership of the region has condemned the killing of Ayyad. “We are part of the same nation,” said Ismail Haniyeh, prime minister of Gaza. “We are not going to allow anyone to sabotage this historical relationship.” ☞

INews/ABACAUSA



ASSASSINATED Christians attend the funeral of Rami Ayyad who was assassinated when the religious bookshop he ran was blown up. Islamic gunmen had beaten Ayyad in the days prior to the explosion.

Christians Respond to Attacks on Nonviolent Protestors in Myanmar

Christian leaders have condemned the violent crackdown against pro-democracy demonstrators in Myanmar (formerly Burma), and are urging government officials in the east Asian nation to cease the use of excessive force in ending the protests.

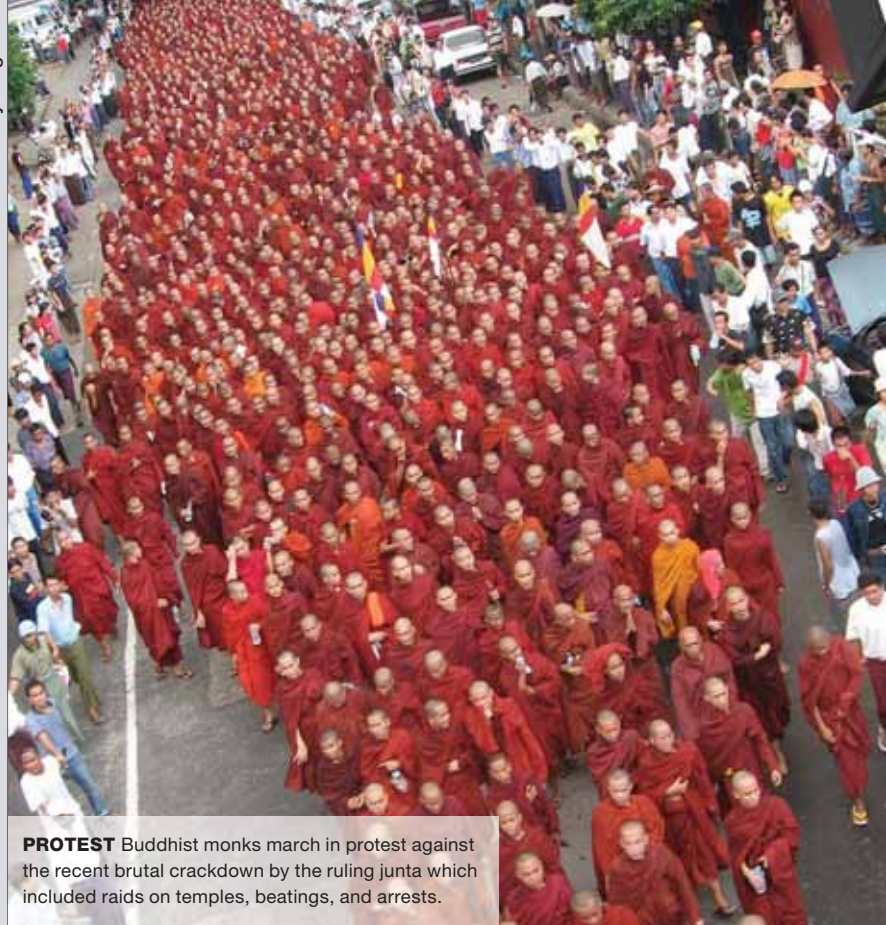
In mid September, nearly 35,000 protesters, led by Buddhist monks, marched in the streets of Yangon to protest rising fuel costs and increasingly oppressive military rule. The response by government troops against the unarmed protesters has resulted in deaths estimated by some news sources to be in the thousands. Raids on Buddhist temples around the country have resulted in the arrests of hundreds of monks.

Pope Benedict XVI has expressed “great trepidation” concerning the events in Myanmar. “I invite the entire Church to [pray], and I hope that a peaceful solution can be found for the good of the country,” he said.

“The people of Myanmar are again demanding liberty from a harsh, repressive government,” said the Rev. Randy Day, executive director of the United Methodist Church General Board of Global Missions. “They are being led by courageous Buddhist monks. Again, the government shows signs of responding with deadly force as it did in 1988, when government troops shot 3000 peaceful demonstrators.”

In a press release, the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia expressed objection to the “violent repression of unarmed protestors.” “We condemn this brutal attack on religious leaders and civilians,” the statement said. “We call upon Burma’s military government to bring an immediate end to this bloody crackdown and to pursue a path of peaceful dialogue towards democratic governance.”

AFP/Getty Images



PROTEST Buddhist monks march in protest against the recent brutal crackdown by the ruling junta which included raids on temples, beatings, and arrests.

In his address, Weygan claimed that students skipping classes to play bingo or slot machines had reached epidemic proportions. “Because these children become drop-outs, they end up becoming members and leaders of street youth gangs, who are now a growing headache in our city,” he said.

Baguio City, located in the northern Benguet province, serves as the summer capital for the Philippines. It is the educational center of Luzon, serving as home to eight institutions of higher learning, including the University of the Philippines. Roughly 50,000 of the city’s 350,000 residents are students.

“We have to plan out our strategies and actions on how to really help stop this gambling menace, and we have to march in the streets if need be,” the Rev. Donald Soriano of the evangelical Bethesda Ministries told supporters at an August 20 meeting.

Missing Pakistani Christian Girls Found as Muslim Wives

Two Pakistani girls missing since August 2007 have been found as recently married wives to Muslim men, Compass Direct News reports.

Zunaira Rasheed, an 11-year-old girl from Faisalabad, disappeared on August 5. A certificate of marriage between Rasheed and Muhammad Adnan dated August 9 has since been produced. The certificate, signed by Muslim cleric Kareem Muhammad Ramazan, noted Rasheed’s conversion to Islam and stated her age as 18.

A second girl, 16-year-old Shamaila Tabassum, was abducted in Faisalabad on August 16. Tabassum told relatives she was going with Muslim neighbors to visit her father in the hospital, where he was recuperating from a serious injury. Family members became suspicious when Tabassum’s father returned home later

the same day in good health.

Tabassum’s father filed a complaint with the Faisalabad police on August 18, accusing neighbor Mohammad Mazhar of kidnapping, and expressing his fear that Mazhar intended to forcibly convert his daughter. On August 22, Tabassum’s father was presented with a copy of a marriage certificate for his daughter and Mazhar. The document was dated August 4, 12 days prior to Tabassum’s disappearance.

Pakistani law does not permit those under the age of 18 to enter into legal contracts, including agreements to marry.

Khalil Tahir, a Christian attorney in Faisalabad, has agreed to take both cases on a pro bono basis, due to the financial hardships of both families. Tahir claims that despite his legal obligation to register these criminal cases, the chief of police has failed to do so.

Church News

Evangelical Youth Groups Targeting Boys with Shoot-'em-up Video Game

Teenage boys and young men are among those most difficult for church leaders to reach, but according to the *New York Times*, evangelical Christian groups have seized on an unlikely recruiting tool to draw teenage boys to church: a violent and popular video game that is to be sold only to those over 17 years of age.

Church groups across the country are increasingly holding special *Halo* game playing nights, tapping into the phenomenal success of the Microsoft video game series, the third installment of which was released in September.

According to the *New York Times* article, some parents, religious ethicists, and pastors are openly questioning the pursuit of relevancy, saying that *Halo* may succeed at attracting youths, but that it could have a corroding influence. In providing *Halo*, churches are permitting access to adult-themed material that young people cannot buy on their own.

Asked to comment in the *New York Times* article, IRD President Jim Tonkovich said, "If you want to connect with young teenage boys and drag them into church, free alcohol and pornographic movies would do it. My own take is you can do better than that."

According to *The Independent*, a prominent UK newspaper, *Halo 3* is already the fastest-selling video game of all time, with sales of \$300 million in its first week. 📖

Religious Left Groups Hold Interfaith Anti-War Fast on Columbus Day

Officials from several progressive religious organizations joined in a press conference September 26 on the lawn of the Methodist Building on Capitol Hill to call for a Columbus Day fast protesting the Iraq war. The group, which included leaders from the National Council of Churches,

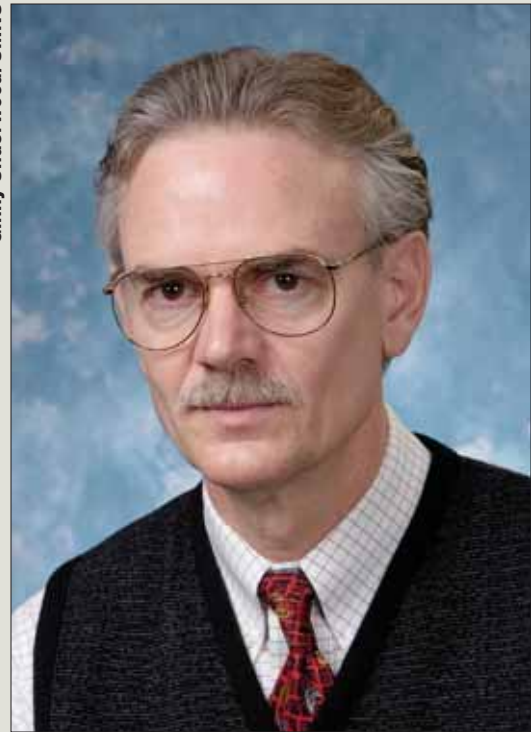
NCC Announces New General Secretary Nominee on Heels of Major Staff Cuts, Financial Shortfall

The National Council of Churches (NCC) has announced the nomination of the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon to serve as the new general secretary of the organization. The nomination of Kinnamon, a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) clergyman, quickly followed the announcement of the cuts of 14 staff positions in order to address a million dollar budget shortfall, according to a reorganization plan announced by the NCC on September 27. The council has a tenuous financial history but was generally thought to have stabilized in recent years, due to increased funding from secular foundations.

According to NCC Acting General Secretary Clare Chapman, the budget shortfall stemmed from lower-than-expected income from two of three main revenue streams for the NCC: denominational member contributions, foundation grants, and royalties from resources like the NRSV translation of the Bible. Among the positions being eliminated, two are deputy general secretaries and six are associate general secretaries. Prior to the cuts, the NCC employed about 40 full-time staff members.

Kinnamon is already well-known in his own denomination after his 1991 candidacy for the head of the Disciples of Christ met with strong opposition from church members who said his views denied the authority of Scripture. Kinnamon's nomination was eventually defeated at the denomination's General Assembly when he failed to garner the necessary two-thirds vote. 📖

Ginny Underwood/UMNS



the Council on American Islamic Relations, and several mainline Protestant agencies such as the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, was seeking the exit of all U.S. troops from Iraq immediately.

Speakers at the press conference included Dr. Sayyid Sayeed of the Islamic Society of North America, who said that the Koran not only calls Muslims to fast during Ramadan but commands: "Thou shalt fast in solidarity with other faiths and generations who have fasted." He announced that mosques would open their

doors on October 8 so that "people of other faiths will come in and break fast with their Muslim neighbors."

Also leading in the press conference was Rabbi Debra Kolodny of the Aleph Alliance for Jewish Renewal and author of *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith*. Kolodny, who is a proponent of "polyamory" (i.e., multiple sexual partners), led participants by saying, "today we will activate our senses..." by blowing the *shofar* (a traditional ram's horn instrument) "just as Jews have called ourselves to wake up" and acknowledge past transgressions.

“How often is an official from the Islamic Society of North America likely to spend a late summer morning in public solidarity with a bisexual Jewish rabbi?” opined UMAction Director Mark Tooley in an editorial. “Only the United Methodist Board of Church and Society could facilitate such a cosmic event.” 📖

Protests Prompt U.S. to Modify Prison Policy on Religious Books

Prison libraries can once again be stocked with religious books from a variety of authors after the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons reversed itself and decided against removing “non-approved” books based on terrorism concerns.

The reversal came following criticism from some U.S. lawmakers and both progressive and orthodox religious leaders, among them Prison Fellowship president Mark Earley, who said the policy was like “swatting a fly with a sledgehammer.”

As part of the “Standardized Chapel Library Project,” the Bureau of Prisons had limited prison libraries to 150 approved book titles. Critics pointed out that this would exclude numerous respected theologians, among them Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr.

According to Ecumenical News, the bureau said it expected that some “inappropriate” materials that could be deemed “radicalizing” or might “incite violence” could still be removed, though the amount of such material would probably be small. 📖

Church Leaders Meet Again With Ahmadinejad

An interfaith delegation that included United Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and others met for an hour-long meeting with Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on September 26 during his visit to the United Nations. The meeting, held across from the UN at the United Methodist-owned Church Center for the United Nations, was billed as a “time of

Outrageous Quote

“All are welcome at St. Paul’s Cathedral in Boston, Massachusetts on October 13 at 5:30 p.m. for the HipHopEMass ‘Big Bean’ Celebration with the newest Hip Hop Bishop, ‘Great Momma’ Gayle Harris.”

— The official website of the Episcopal Church, promoting “Hip Hop Schoolhouse”—a two-day “hip hop worship learning party” in Boston.

dialogue and prayerful reflection among the children of Abraham” during which the religious groups stressed the need for diplomacy to prevent war.

During the two-and-a-half-hour meeting with the religious leaders, the Iranian president dismissed suggestions that his country violates human rights, according to Ecumenical News.

“We have the highest possible standards regarding observing human rights,” a report on the website of the Geneva-based World Council of Churches quoted Ahmadinejad as saying. The Iranian leader added, “Some violators of human rights try to solve the world’s problems merely at gunpoint.”

While Ahmadinejad was met with pointed criticism and a blistering introduction at Columbia University on the same trip, the *New York Times* labeled the meeting at the Church Center as a “warm, even friendly exchange.” 📖

Islamic Group Honors NCC Official

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) honored the top interfaith official of the National Council of Churches (NCC) with its “Interfaith Unity Award” at its recent convention in Chicago. The award inscription read: “Islamic Society of North America presents [the] Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana, a fellow activist for peace, justice and reconciliation, a ‘Christian believer’ as described in Qur’an

(3:113) in recognition of his tireless contribution to advancing inter-religious dialogue and partnership, with our prayers for a continued demonstration of energy, understanding and commitment.”

In accepting the award, Premawardhana warned ISNA about the IRD, which he described as a “far right-wing advocacy organization.” His criticism was aimed at a book by Efraim Karsh, titled *Islamic Imperialism*, sent to tens of thousands of churches across America by the IRD earlier this year. “Despite it being published by Yale University Press, the book has only a thin veneer of academic scholarship,” Premawardhana asserted. “Its purpose is not to educate but to persuade towards a right-wing ideology.”

Karsh’s book details the centuries-long military conquest of Islam across Asia and Africa and into Europe from its founding until the Renaissance era. “It does not seek to restore relationships as the Bible teaches, but to destroy relationships by fear-mongering,” Premawardhana complained.

“You are doing the will of God,” said Premawardhana to the assembled Muslims. “You are the ones upholding faith and serving humanity. You are my sisters and brothers.”

Premawardhana recently announced that he is leaving the NCC to begin work at a new position at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. 📖

HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE IN AN AGE OF TERROR

by Keith Pavlischek

A critical examination of “The Evangelical Declaration Against Torture”

The Evangelical Declaration Against Torture claims to be a teaching document, somewhat akin to Roman Catholic encyclicals written to provide moral guidance to faithful believers on matters of grave moral concern. The reader might expect, therefore, a careful definition of “torture”—the subject under discussion—and then a careful well-thought out case for what is morally permissible, or impermissible, the current status of U.S. law, how that law relates to “international law,” and a careful review of the moral

and legal issues over which well-intentioned Christian believers might disagree.

At the very least, one might have expected the declaration to offer an extended comment on the definition

in the 1985 UN Convention on Torture, to which the U.S. is bound by law. There torture is described as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person.” But such a careful discussion is nowhere to be found.

Indeed, upon release the document received sharp criticism for not defining “torture.” In response, lead

drafter David Gushee confessed that this failure was intentional. In fact, he implicitly claimed that any such attempt to define torture was itself morally suspect.

I share Gushee’s conviction that torture is repugnant (including techniques some have defended, such as waterboarding), and think it should be banned. I also agree with Gushee that there are very rare circumstances in which an exception to that ban might be justified by loyalty to higher moral obligations (such as when faced with the possibility of a mass casualty attack). The moral and legal questions surrounding such exceptional circumstances are vastly too complicated to sort out here. This broad agreement about the repugnance of torture, however, is not enough. It does not absolve Gushee and the other framers of the declaration from the obligation to define their terms.

One problem with attempting to define torture in detail is that any definition can then be employed as a way to narrow the boundaries of what is morally and legally forbidden and to broaden the boundaries of what is morally and legally permissible. This has occurred in national discussions of torture since 2003 and the drafters of this document wanted no part of that.

Such a refusal, however, simply begs the question, leaves murky central issues that deserve careful reflection, and is morally and academically irresponsible. It encourages the shifting of terms, foreclosing the possibility of reasoned debate at the outset. Even worse, the failure to carefully define terms will give license for those eager to equate opposition to the declaration with support for torture.

At the very least, one might have expected the declaration to offer an extended comment on the definition of torture.

BEARING THE SWORD (ABOVE) Nowhere in the Evangelical Declaration Against Torture is there a careful reflection on Romans 13, or any other biblical texts dealing with the obligation of the state to protect its citizens.

A Missed Opportunity to Address a Complex Issue Seriously

In failing to define torture with any degree of precision, the declaration misses an opportunity to open a serious discussion among Christians of the moral permissibility of “enhanced interrogation techniques,” or “moderate physical pressure,” or what some critics pejoratively and prejudicially term “torture lite.” One might reasonably wonder how you can seriously engage in reasoned dialogue on the permissibility of what is “not torture” if you don’t define what you mean by “torture.” The declaration thus fails to address with any rigor what is perhaps the most serious real-life point of contention in detainee policy: whether it is morally permissible (and legally permissible for non-Defense Department personnel) to employ interrogation techniques on unlawful enemy combatants that otherwise would not be permissible to employ on lawful enemy combatants, or honorable captured soldiers held in POW status.

While the declaration refuses to define “torture,” it nevertheless confesses that it will wade into “a broader discussion of policies related to the legal standards that would be employed in detaining, trying, transferring, or punishing suspected terrorists . . .”(1.5) Because the declaration fails to define “torture,” the careful critic is forced to engage the document on these “broader issues,” as well as the political theology upon which that broader set of conclusions is grounded.

But I suspect that, in any case, Professor Gushee and I would reach quite similar conclusions on the range of interrogation techniques that should be termed “torture,” and hence be banned without exception. And I suspect there would be little daylight between our respective criticisms of the abuses at Abu Ghraib. (For the record, I believe that far more military heads should have rolled and military careers been summarily terminated for gross failure of leadership and command discipline, regard-

less of direct culpability for the abusive treatment.)

While the failure to define the ostensible term under discussion and the promise to wade into highly partisan public policy debates renders the document suspect from the start, one might expect that more care would be given to the political theology upon which the public-policy conclusions are grounded. In fact, the political theology of the document is profoundly flawed and intellectually incoherent.

Most obvious is that despite boatloads of biblical proof-texting, especially in the opening section on the sanctity of human life, nowhere does one find a careful reflection on Romans 13. Indeed, no classical biblical text directly related to the normative role of civil government, the obligation of civil authority to protect its citizens, or those texts relevant to retributive justice or punishment are

The document was written such that its political theology would be acceptable to a minority of anti-war pacifists, who believe and advocate nothing less than unilateral disarmament in the war on terror.

discussed.

How do we account for such a serious omission? The answer is found toward the end of the document in the section “The Role of the State.” The authors concede that it is the “responsibility of a nation’s government to protect its people from terrorist acts.” But then in endnote 60 we find this: “The majority of the signatories of this document stand in the just-war tradition. Those who are pacifists believe that government should carry out its important responsibilities using non-lethal methods.” The document was written such that its political theology, and not merely its conclusions related to the war on terror and detainee policy, would be acceptable to a minority of anti-war pacifists, who believe and advocate nothing less than unilateral disarmament in the war on terror.

Now, I suspect I’m not alone in finding risible the suggestion that non-lethal

tactics and weapons are the only morally permissible means that police and military forces may use to protect the innocent from terrorists. One might also be forgiven for thinking that were the views of the pacifist signatories widely accepted, legal and moral issues surrounding detainee policy would be a moot point, since the prospect of Islamic radicals surrendering to those who pose no lethal threat would be rather slight. But I’m more concerned with how this admission renders the political theology of the document incoherent.

An Absolutist Definition

The discussion of “Human Rights” in the declaration opens with an absolutist definition: “Human rights function to protect the dignity of human life. Because human rights guard what God has made sacred, they cannot be cancelled by any other concern, nor can they be bracket-

eted off as irrelevant in exigent circumstances. This is in contrast to the view that a right can be cancelled or overridden.” The document declares that “human rights place a shield around people,

even when (especially when) our hearts cry out for vengeance.”

Now, if the “right to life” can never be “bracketed off,” can never be “cancelled or overridden,” one may reasonably ask how it is possible for civil authority to wage a just war that permits and even obligates some citizens to kill enemy combatants, deprive a person of life as a punishment for a capital crime, or in lesser cases, of liberty, property and the pursuit of happiness through imprisonment. The declaration not only seems oblivious to the difficulty, but it prejudices the argument by denouncing “vengeance” (which is left undefined) as a response to terrorist attacks, without carefully articulating the difference between private vengeance and the just public use of force by political authority.

Nowhere in the declaration is there anything remotely close to a substantive biblical or theological discussion of this

most fundamental question of public justice. The only section of the document where the issue is hinted at is in paragraph 3.7. Since “human life is expressed through physicality, and the well-being of persons is tied to their physical existence,” we must conclude that “humans must have the right to security of persons. This includes the right not to have one’s life taken unjustly” That’s it! But, one may ask, what warrant is there for that word “unjustly”? Where did that idea come from? How is the just taking of human life, liberty, or property by public authority distinguished from mere “vengeance”?

And even more profoundly, one may ask how consistent this is with the fundamental moral convictions of the pacifists who endorsed the document. By definition they have told us that life can only be taken unjustly.

Whatever we may think of the practical effects of the pacifism espoused by the evangelical pacifist signatories of the declaration, we can nevertheless appreciate their logical consistency. When they say that the human right to life is absolute and can’t be “cancelled” or “trumped,” they mean it.

An Unsalvageable Incoherence

On the other hand, one might think that the non-pacifist signatories do believe that the most basic human right, the right to life, can be justly “cancelled” or justly “trumped” or subject to qualification, even though the rhetorical trajectory of the document runs counter to that interpretation. One can’t help but suspect that in order to keep the pacifist wing from jumping ship, these contradictions had to be suppressed in the political theology of the document. Were they not suppressed, the reader might be tempted to ask the obvious question: If a person’s “right to life” may legitimately be “cancelled,” “trumped,” or “subject to qualification,” then why not his “right” to be free from interrogation methods that, while unpleasant, nevertheless do not qualify as torture?

Indeed, given the rights-based methodological logic of the declaration, you

can only justify a ban on outright torture if you accept the more rigorous pacifist-absolutist interpretation of the “sanctity of human life” and the pacifist-absolutist understanding of human rights. A non-pacifist simply cannot reach the absolutist conclusion prohibiting torture, at least with the declaration’s method of moral reasoning.

Superficiality and incoherence are the prices paid for being methodologically agnostic on the foundational question of the just use of force. These failings render the declaration profoundly unsalvageable. The National Association of Evangelicals would do well to reconsider its hasty endorsement of the document, lest it cause scandal among the faithful and further confirm suspicions about the infamous “scandal of the evangelical mind.”

Legal and Illegal Combatants: The Substantive Deal Breaker

Finally, the declaration omits any acknowledgement of the moral and political distinction between lawful and unlawful combatants. Legally, terrorists fighting for al Qaeda and other associated extremist organizations are presumptively not covered by the 1949 Third Geneva Convention of Prisoners of War (GCPW), under which combatants in international conflicts are permitted to commit acts of belligerency that are otherwise prohibited when enacted toward the private individual. Such combatants, if captured, have a right to special treatment as prisoners of war, and their rights extend far beyond the right not to be tortured. One hastens to observe, however, that the right to this treatment does not extend to any guerrilla, militia, irregular, or terrorist engaged in an international conflict.

Most fundamentally, these provisions can be summarized as an attempt to incorporate the *jus in bello* principle of noncombatant immunity into international agreements, with the single and overriding purpose of protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure during times of war. However, terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda exist precisely to flout those laws by refusing to bear arms

openly in their residing in and among civilians and civilian infrastructure. Thus, they obviously have chosen not to meet the terms required to gain the privileges and immunities of GCPW.

The declaration, in effect, calls for granting to terrorists the full panoply of rights granted by the Geneva Convention without requiring them to meet the obligations required by it. That’s bad enough. But the declaration further suggests that, should evangelicals such as myself resist such claims, they are insufficiently attentive to the “sanctity of human life” and to “human rights.” What the declaration fails to appreciate, however, is that this insistence is itself a betrayal of the civilizing impulses of the Geneva Convention and more fundamentally a betrayal of the Christian just war tradition’s theological and historical contribution to that civilizing impulse. As Andrew McCarthy puts it:

On the Third Geneva Convention, literal terms aside, I believe *it is a betrayal of the treaty’s civilizing impulses to grant its benefits to those who refuse to take up its burdens*. Geneva’s *raison d’être* is to impel warriors to conform to its civilian-protective standards. If you reward barbarity by treating terrorist operatives as if they were honorable combatants, you are guaranteeing more barbarity (emphasis mine).

International terrorists deserve to be treated justly. However, they do not deserve to be treated either as lawful combatants with the full rights due to honorable prisoners of war, or as ordinary criminals, with all the attendant due-process rights. They are not ordinary criminals; rather, they are part of a global political-religious-ideological insurgency that employs terror as one means toward a well-articulated political end.

The Need to Re-Engage the Just War Tradition

This is no minor point between those of us who would defend the classic just war tradition against the pacifist and quasi-

A Closer Look at the Evangelical Declaration Against Torture

pacifist signatories to the declaration. There is something profound at stake here.

In thinking about how they should respond to moral challenges such as torture in an age of terror, American evangelical academic theologians and activists must come to grips with the proper moral and political distinctions that Christians have struggled with throughout the ages. Just so, the framers of the declaration might have reflected on the distinction that whatever non-state terrorists are owed, they don't deserve the same "rights" as honorable warriors captured on the field of battle, and from there seek to explain just what is and is not owed to them. But those distinctions seem to have eluded the drafters of the declaration.

Professor Gushee and his colleagues, having either explicitly repudiated classic Christian just war teaching or rendered it marginal or irrelevant, have disposed of centuries of Christian theological reflection on political responsibility, the nature of justice, and issues related to justice in war. To carry on the conversation, they need to re-engage with that tradition. ❏

Keith Pavlischek is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. A longer version of this article originally appeared in *Books and Culture*, available online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/books/web/2007/sept24a.html>.

"An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture: Protecting Human Rights in an Age of Terror" has attracted attention not only for the provocative assertions that it makes, but also for who has endorsed those assertions. Most notably, the declaration was endorsed by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) Board of Directors at its March meeting.

The document alleges that "the terrorist attacks that jolted the nation in 2001 have blurred our national moral vision." In particular, "[t]he boundaries of what is legally and morally permissible in war have been crossed in the current 'war on terror.'"

The declaration charges the United States with a pattern of "acts of torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment against U.S. detainees." It blames the policies of the Bush administration, which "has decided to retain morally questionable interrogation techniques among the options available to our intelligence agencies." It warns that the Military Commissions Act, passed by Congress in 2006, "could prove to be a recipe for cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of detainees, without the Constitution's checks and balances so crucial for American justice."

The declaration was first issued in March as a product of the newly formed Evangelicals for Human Rights. The principal drafter was David Gushee, a professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University in Georgia. Gushee has also been prominent recently in mobilizing evangelicals to fight predicted global warming.

Other members of the drafting committee leaned heavily to the left politically, including figures such as Evangelicals for Social Action founder Ron Sider, Fuller Seminary ethicist Glen Stassen, Princeton Seminary professor George Hunsinger, Yale Divinity School professor Nicholas Wolterstorff, and "emerging church" leader Brian McLaren. Although a couple of other members of the committee appeared to be more moderate, there were no political conservatives of stature comparable to the names above. This is a curious imbalance in a committee claiming to represent a group—U.S. evangelicals—that leans so heavily to the right.

A key member of the drafting committee was Richard Cizik, the NAE Vice President for Governmental Affairs. It was Cizik who brought the declaration to the NAE board for its endorsement. Board members received the extensive document—18 pages long, with 65 footnotes—a mere two days before their meeting was to convene. The discussion at the meeting was brief—less than an hour—and dwelled on minor points such as the document's title. Profound criticisms, such as those registered by Keith Pavlischek in these pages, were not expressed. The NAE board endorsed the declaration by a vote of 38 to 1.

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Fusion for Freedom

The joining of the Chinese house churches with pro-democracy intellectuals creates a powerful force for transformation

by Faith J.H. McDonnell

For decades, Chinese house churches have been faithful witnesses to the Gospel, suffering persecution and oppression in Communist China. And for many years, the church in China has been growing at an annual rate of several million. Mainland Catholics and Protestants now total over 70 million by the most cautious of estimates. House churches are China's largest non-governmental organization, found throughout the nation. In numbers alone, the Chinese church seems prepared to push China toward true democracy.

But over recent years, the church in China also has been the recipient of new energy and confidence with which to confront the government of the People's Republic. Many new Chinese converts to Christianity are young urban intellectuals—authors, lawyers, journalists, and members of the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement. The traditional house church movement has proclaimed boldly and suffered willingly for the cause of Christ. The young, intellectual pro-democracy movement has courageously challenged the Chinese government to embrace democracy and human rights. The fusion of the two is a powerful force for transformation in China.

The Chinese house church is not the first such

fusion. In the former Soviet Union, traditional Baptist, Pentecostal, and Orthodox believers were joined in the 1970s by university students and other young intellectuals disillusioned with Marxism. New converts Alexander Ogorodnikov and Vladimir Poresh held informal gatherings they named “The Christian Seminar,” to discuss religion and philosophy in Moscow, Leningrad, and elsewhere. Poets like Irina Ratushinskaya inspired courage and determination. All of these, along with the traditional Christians whom they had joined, were seen as troublemakers by the authorities. They endured many years in the gulag for “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda,” but they helped bring about the downfall of the Soviet Union.

Today's new Chinese Christians include intellectuals such as the well-known Chinese author Yu Jie. Yu, whose books have been banned in China, and his wife, Liu Min, are the pastors of a house church in Beijing, the Ark Church. The Ark Church was established in late 2001 as a Bible study of three women, led by Liu Min. Min had accepted Christ and been baptized earlier that year after a period of intense searching, which she related in an essay entitled, “My Spiritual Journey Under God's Grace.”

Just before Christmas 2003, Yu also became a Christian and was soon co-pastoring the church. Now the Ark Church has about 50 members. While small, the church is a microcosm of the intellectual elite: it includes authors, lawyers, journalists, editors, artists, and musicians, as well as dissidents and people who were disabled during the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Yu calls such believers “Christian public intellectuals,” a new term used

HOUSE CHURCHES (ABOVE) Charlene Fu and Zhang Boli speak about the plight of the Chinese house churches at the Family Research Council. (Faith McDonnell/IRD)

in China to refer to intellectuals who speak out publicly about important matters, not just on subjects related to their own areas of expertise. Other members of the church are ordinary laborers and migrant workers from rural areas. Yu marvels that “if not for their church ties, it would be impossible for these people from such different social and educational backgrounds to become a special ‘unified’ body.”

Yu described the Ark Church in his presentation “China’s House Church Is a Crucial Force in Transforming China into a Democracy,” hosted by IRD on September 25, on Capitol Hill. The Ark is an “above ground” house church. This is opposed to an “underground” house church, the traditional way to describe unregistered churches in China that do not wish to be known to the authorities. The Ark Church has a publication called “Olive Branch,” which discusses political, legal, economic, and educational issues. It also challenges important human rights problems, including family planning and forced abortions. This is reminiscent of the publications that came out of the Christian Seminar movement in the Soviet Union. In addition, the Ark Church helps the persecuted church in rural areas to defend its religious freedom by providing *pro bono* legal assistance and publicizing aspects of the national law that should be known to Christians, such as the guarantee of religious freedom described in the Chinese

Constitution. The Ark Church is also open in that it welcomes communication with Western media and foreign diplomats, and invites them to participate in its worship services, “to understand the real situation of the Chinese church.”

Yu says that China’s public intellectual Christians have discovered an often overlooked fact: “In the collapse of totalitarianism and the establishment of democratic systems in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, religious faith played a critical role.” This reality may have been overlooked by the secular world in general, but it has definitely not been overlooked by the Chinese Communist Party. For years the Chinese government has declared that it must “strangle the baby in the manger,” using a curious biblical allusion to describe its intention of destroying Christian dissent. And the Communists have indeed tried to crush it—as attested to by the bruised and beaten flesh of shackled prisoners. But like the Christians described by St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 4: 8–10, the Chinese Christians have been “persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

One recent victim of the Chinese Communist Party’s efforts to stop the spread of Christianity is Beijing pastor Hua Huiqi. According to information from the China Aid Association (www.chinaaid.org), Hua was attacked by officials from the Public Security Bureau, China’s main law enforcement agency, on October 11. He was beaten so severely that he only came to consciousness three days later in the hospital. Bob Fu, president of the China Aid Association, reported that earlier the same month, Hua and his family had been under house arrest and

without electricity for several days. Hua wrote, “Over the past 17 years, my family and I have often received brothers and sisters coming from all over the country. Because of this, the Chinese police have on many occasions persecuted, threatened, terrorized, beaten, and detained me.”

Hua had been arrested in November 2006 on “suspicion of interfering with the execution of public duties,” and sentenced to half a year in prison. Hua’s elderly mother, Shuang Shuying, was kicked and beaten by the Chinese Olympic Games police when she made an inquiry. She was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison. The authorities told Hua that if he would “lure Bob Fu ... to mainland China and tell us how the fund from China Aid gets into China, we will release your mother.” Hua asks Christians around the world to pray for him and his family. He also asks that we pray “for the Chinese police and ask God to soften their heart,” for the early release of his mother, who is in failing health in detention, and for “God to touch the heart of the police to make them treat senior citizens well.”

On October 4, the China Aid Association learned that nine other house church leaders from Anhui, Hubei, Henan, and Shanxi provinces, missing for two months, had been sentenced to “re-education through labor” in Hubei province. According to the sentence issued on August 6, by the Administrative Committee for Reeducation through Labor of Enshizhou City of Hubei province, the nine were detained on July 15 when they were found celebrating Sunday worship together at the home of Ms. Qin Daomin. Their crime was “engaging in organizing and making use of evil cult organization to undermine the enforcement of State laws.” Listed as evidence of their crimes were singing Christian hymns to the villagers, showing Campus Crusade for Christ’s *Jesus* film in a nursing home, and praying for God’s healing of disabled elderly men. One female house church leader, 42-year-old Ms. Li Mei, has been serving her one-year



DISLOCATION Bob Fu, president and founder of the China Aid Association, and house church pastor and former prisoner, Peter Xu, demonstrate a form of torture used on Chinese Christians. (Faith McDonnell/IRD)

GATHERED IRD Director of Religious Liberty Programs Faith McDonnell, with journalist and author David Aikman, Zhang Boli, and Yu Jie. (Courtesy Faith McDonnell)

sentence chained to a hospital bed. Because of repeated beatings and torture by the police, she needs a hysterectomy.

As the Beijing Olympics draw near, the crackdown on Christians in China grows more severe. In some cases, the Christian intellectuals have assisted house church leaders and others by pointing out their rights specified under Chinese law, and equipping them to challenge the Chinese government regarding these rights. For instance, Christians are trained to ask for the name and badge number of police, and when officials attempt to confiscate house churches' books and papers, they ask to see the documents authorizing these confiscations, including the specific titles that are to be confiscated. But although this new information increases the confidence of house church leaders, it is all too clear that it does not always prevent the government's abuse and oppression of Christians.

In addition to house church leaders, human rights activists and attorneys have been arrested and imprisoned. On September 19, U.S. Representative Trent Franks (R-AZ) and 33 other members of Congress sent a letter to Chinese President Hu calling for the release of Chen Guangcheng, a blind human rights advocate, and drawing attention to China's forced abortion family planning policy. Chen was sentenced to over four years of imprisonment for his advocacy for the victims of forced abortion. According to China Aid, a massive forced abortion campaign is targeting Christian families in the Guangxi Province (Autonomous Region). On April 17, 1 pastor's wife, seven months pregnant, and 40 other women were dragged into the hospital from their homes. They were given injections to induce labor and to kill the babies. The next day, 20 more pregnant women were brought in for the same treatment.

Gao Zhisheng, a prominent human rights attorney, was arrested and imprisoned on September 22 after holding a press conference in which he released



a letter to the U.S. Congress expressing his concerns over the deterioration of human rights in China. China Aid adds that there are reports of friends of Gao being tortured and threatened by the secret police. On September 29, another well-known human rights attorney, Li Heping, was kidnapped and tortured for six hours before being released into the woods. Other abuses include businesses with long standing in China being shut down, and the confiscation of Bibles and other Christian materials.

Although persecution has intensified because of the Chinese government's fear of losing control during the Olympics, Yu Jie believes that the Olympics still provide a great opportunity. In his September 25 remarks, Yu said that Christians in China hope that the West will keep pressure on China up to the time of the Olympic Games. "We are not in favor of opposing the Olympics," he said, "rather, we advocate making use of the opportunity afforded by the Olympics to push the Communist authorities [to] make great strides in improving the situation of religious freedom in China so that the Chinese house church can have greater opportunities for contact and fellowship with the Western Church." Yu told of international journalists who have pressed the Chinese government for more freedom around the period of the Olympic Games. "Non-government organizations working for religious freedom, churches, and all Christians should follow the

journalists' example and bravely band together without regard to national borders to mount a large-scale evangelism campaign directed at China," he challenged. "Even though they will be expelled, each expulsion case can become a news event, a crack that opens the iron curtain."

The western church should also follow the Chinese church example. Christians in the West should support the Chinese house churches in whatever ways they can. Having been spared the fires of persecution and repression, many western Christians either take democracy for granted or dissociate it from Christianity. But for Chinese Christians, there is no dissociation. They believe a free, democratic China will arise through Christianity. Yu Jie says the Christian public intellectuals are "an emerging group possessed of the spirit of both the prophets and of the Apostle Paul; they are new blood flowing into the house churches, greatly augmenting the knowledge and wisdom as well as the strength and power of the house churches, to make the Chinese house church an elite force in transforming the whole of Chinese society." Such a transformation would benefit western society, too. ☒



Faith J.H. McDonnell is the Director of Religious Liberty Programs at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

African Bishop Emphasizes Centrality of Christ in Healing Society

by Rebekah M. Sharpe

Those who fear that the church's programs and good intentions sometimes overshadow the Gospel need look no further for encouragement than one of Bishop Nkulu Ntanda Ntambo's recent sermons. "Money is not so important," the bishop told United Methodists in western New York. "It's more important to bring Jesus to someone. If the fundraising's not coming from the bottom of your heart, if Jesus is not there, it's empty. It's just vanity."

He told delegates at the June 2007 Western New York Annual Conference that when Peter and John healed the crippled man in Acts 3, "The big difference between people giving him [the crippled man] money and what John and Peter gave him was this: with Jesus he was given dignity now... As soon as he started walking, he was able to get a job, get married."

Ntambo's sermon was carried on the website of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, which headlined it as a rebuke to American wealth. But Ntambo did not imply that America's prosperity was itself sinful or sinister. Rather, he suggested that wealth was of limited effectiveness in transforming the world. His comments indicated that charity is a virtue best demonstrated when its material and spiritual evidences occur together. According to him, the gift of Christ is more important because it is a gift of "vision into the future."

Ntambo observed that his native Congo "is extremely rich," because of an unusually long and wet growing season and because of the diamond wealth. But he noted that despite this wealth, "We are killing one another back home. We are hating one another back home." He said that, in Christ's absence, his country had

"no joy." Instead of advocating a political or economic fix, Ntambo questioned, "Who should we seek to change my country? Jesus?"

America, too, is rich, Ntambo said, "You Americans enjoy life." But he warned, "All this wealth—this is not going to change the world. Jesus will change the world."

Speaking from his own experience, Ntambo described his transformation from a trained guerrilla insurgent in the war against the Belgian colonial government in the 1960s. "I didn't grow up in a Christian family," he said. "My grandfather was a cannibal. I grew up worshipping idols." Additionally, said the bishop, "I grew up hating others, whoever didn't speak my language. They were my enemies."

The epiphany came for Ntambo when he read "a small book... about Martin Luther King." He was challenged by King's love towards whites despite what King suffered. "That was a struggle in my own life," Ntambo said. "How can I love my enemy?" The bishop realized that King's answer was "Jesus."

When Ntambo completed seminary and partnered with two American missionaries, the transformation was complete. "Honestly, I am a black, but I heard my brother and sister who are white," Ntambo recalled. "At the beginning we had 5 churches ... but at the end of my 6 years as superintendent, 157 UM churches were planted!"

In contrast to this Christian unity, Ntambo remarked, "Today, the world is so divided." He lamented: "Many families are broken There is poor and rich We can't bring them together as far as Christians, unless we're willing to bring Jesus to them."

Like "Peter and John, [who] were

united as one," Ntambo claimed that church unity was essential to accomplishing the goal of offering Christ to the world, just as the apostles were "not alone."

"How can we do great miracles if we are not united, if we are divided?" Ntambo asked rhetorically. "If we want to change the world, we need to be united as one."

Again admonishing the church body, Ntambo said: "The early church knew the importance of prayer. The strength of any church in the world is nothing if it can't go out in prayer." He reminded delegates of the example of Peter, John, and the early church, saying, "Every day at three, they went to pray."

Pointing to Peter's and John's effective ministry, Ntambo observed: "Before they [came] to this group of persons to be healed, they knew the importance of prayer, and they were united as one—one God, one Spirit, one faith."

Ntambo is the leader of the North Katanga Episcopal Area of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The overall Congolese Central Conference accounts for more than 10 percent of global United Methodist membership. While the conference has experienced less growth over the past decade than some other central conferences, its numbers have grown 129.2% in this time period. The increased representation of the central conferences has incited much speculation about the outcome of the 2008 and 2012 United Methodist General Conferences. ☒



Rebekah M. Sharpe is an Administrative Assistant for the UMAction program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

Ralph A. Webb

The Political Triumph of Katharine Jefferts Schori?

by Ralph A. Webb

Near the end of the Episcopal Church House of Bishops September 19–25, 2007, meeting in New Orleans, a retired bishop of the Episcopal Church stood and praised Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. “You are a great leader,” he said, calling her the best of the last four presiding bishops in terms of leadership qualities. A standing ovation followed.

Jefferts Schori had just steered the house through politically choppy waters to the creation of a statement that superficially appeared to meet the primates’ requests but gave no ground on the Episcopal Church’s past actions in

favor of gay and lesbian “inclusion.” Furthermore, by all accounts, the bishops came out of their New Orleans meeting as a more tightly knit group.

The statement clearly was successful politically from a short-term standpoint. But its long-term effect was more nebulous, as the statement did nothing to move the Episcopal Church closer to repenting of its actions that had so fragmented the Anglican Communion.

The Bishop with a “Divided Heart”

The primates’ February communiqué had asked four actions of the Episcopal Church:

- That its House of Bishops would, by September 30, 2007, give its assurance that it would not consent to any further consecrations of bishops in same-sex relationships

- That the bishops would, again by September 30, give their assurance that same-sex blessings in the Episcopal Church would cease
- That the Episcopal Church would participate in a “pastoral scheme” initiated by the primates to both meet the needs of orthodox Anglicans in the denomination and heal the divisions between the Episcopal Church and other provinces in the Anglican Communion
- That all parties involved in lawsuits over property in the Episcopal Church, including the denomination itself, would end the lawsuits

Jefferts Schori returned from Tanzania advocating that the Episcopal Church “fast” from and “pause” in its consents to the consecrations of bishops and same-sex blessings. That platform was greeted with hostility by progressives in the Episcopal Church. By early spring, she frequently called “inclusion” part of the denomination’s “gospel”—a position that the house had emphasized in the statement that came out of its March meeting.

Nevertheless, Jefferts Schori’s most revealing comment arguably came to employees working at the Episcopal Church’s national office on February 23: “I know where my heart lies and it’s in a divided place” between the “full inclusion” of gays and lesbians and the reconciliation of the Episcopal Church with the rest of the Anglican Communion. “In my better moments, I firmly hope and pray that these things are not diametrically opposed,” she revealed.

That “divided place” influenced Jefferts Schori’s outlook on Anglican affairs. On the one hand, she staunchly advocated in favor of gay and lesbian “inclusion.” She

Jefferts Schori steered the house through politically choppy waters but gave no ground on the Episcopal Church’s past actions.

challenged orthodox views of scriptural passages on homosexuality's sinfulness when Bill Moyers questioned her about the topic on PBS' *Bill Moyers Journal*. Christian opposition to Galileo's scientific discoveries, slavery, sexual enjoyment, women's leadership, and gay and lesbian leadership exemplified, in her mind, how "[i]f you expect things to be in a certain way, it's hard to see data that ask you to see the world in a very different way."

On the other hand, Jefferts Schori refused to jettison her view of the Anglican Communion as part of the denomination's future. The presiding bishop dismissed the idea that the Episcopal Church would have to choose between staying in the Anglican Communion and retaining its commitment to "inclusion."

"I think that's a faithless place," she told the *Boston Globe*. "I don't believe God's going to call us to a choice like that."

A Statement of Clarification

So when it came to leading the house in its response to the primates' communiqué, the presiding bishop's influence was pervasive. According to the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina, Jefferts Schori repeatedly urged clarity from the bishops. She also reportedly provided several paragraphs that shaped the entire direction of the statement.

The final statement kept the *status quo* in the Episcopal Church, clarifying where the church stood without providing the assurances requested by the primates:

- It clarified that 2006 General Convention resolution B033 bound the house not to consent to the consecration of bishops in homosexual relationships.
- It restated that the bishops would not "authorize public rites of same-sex blessings."
- It introduced a primatial vicar scheme proposed by Jefferts Schori that allowed parishes and dioceses to have visiting bishops.
- It said nothing about lawsuits.

The statement superficially appeared to contain more than it actually did. The bishops may not consent to the consecration of bishops in same-sex relationships,

Reactions to the House of Bishops Statement

"I do not believe the answers requested by the Primates have been given.... '[W]here we are' is 'walking apart' [from the larger Anglican Communion]."

—Bishop James Stanton of the Diocese of Dallas

"We are convinced that what is at stake in this crisis is the very nature of Anglicanism ... We see a trend that seems to replace [orthodoxy] with a religion of cultural conformity that offers no transforming power and no eternal hope."

—Member bishops of the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA)

"We have learned from the American experience that the matter of human sexuality is never going to be regarded as a minor one. It goes to the heart of our humanity and God's authority."

—Archbishop Peter Jensen of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney (Australia)

"This house is committed to the full participation of gays and lesbians in the life of the church. We have ... work to do [to bring the rest of the Anglican Communion to the Episcopal Church's position]."

—Bishop Thomas Ely of the Diocese of Vermont

"We're on a journey [to the "full inclusion" of gays and lesbians], and the journey has not changed."

—Bishop Nathan Baxter of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

but many progressives are working to ensure that resolution B033 will be repealed at the 2009 General Convention. "Public rites" of same-sex blessings may not be officially "authorized" by bishops, but they are occurring at a local level around the Episcopal Church—even in the absence of official liturgies.

The statement also failed to move the denomination closer to the primates. The Episcopal Church had been asked to place a "moratorium" on both consents to consecrations of bishops in same-sex relationships and same-sex blessings back in 2004's *Windsor Report*. Significantly, while the bishops' statement used much language from the *Windsor Report*, it did not employ the word "moratorium." At the meeting's final press conference, Jefferts Schori confirmed that word's absence was intentional.

World Reaction and Larger Implications

Orthodox Anglicans worldwide reacted with disappointment and weariness to the statement. The Episcopal Church had once again delivered a statement notable as much for what it did not say as what it did say. Also predictably outraged were the gay and lesbian lobby and its supporters in the United States and abroad.

Conservatives were arguably more upset about the reaction to the bishops' statement from the Joint Standing Committee to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates. The committee, which was present for most of the bishops'

meeting, gave the Episcopal Church a "passing grade" on meeting the primates' requests. Orthodox Anglicans charged that the committee grasped onto any evidence that favored the Episcopal Church and often read far too much into the Episcopal Church's response.

Much criticism centered on the interlocking roles of Jefferts Schori and the committee. The presiding bishop, a member of the committee, had maintained her role on it even as it helped the Episcopal Church craft a statement designed to pass muster with much of the Anglican Communion. Consequently, Jefferts Schori's role on the committee undeniably conflicted with her position as presiding bishop.

The house's statement proved unpalatable for many. As fall progressed, additional congregations voted to leave the Episcopal Church. Several largely conservative dioceses prepared to vote on whether to leave the Episcopal Church. On the other side of the spectrum, the Diocese of California voted to permit rites of same-sex blessing. While the presiding bishop undoubtedly had won a political victory, the war in the Episcopal Church and the larger Anglican Communion continued unabated. ☒



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

Health Expert Urges Bishops to Support Government Advocacy and Relief Efforts Over Private Initiative

by Ralph A. Webb

On September 21, the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, meeting in New Orleans, heard a presentation entitled “Health, Human Rights, and the Corporal Works of Mercy” given by Dr. Paul Farmer. Farmer, a physician specializing in infectious diseases and distinguished professor of social medicine at Harvard Medical School, is the founding director of Partners in Health, a charity dedicated to providing health care for the poor. He is highly regarded internationally for his sacrificial work on behalf of the poor and the sick.

Farmer, a Roman Catholic, spoke of the “corporal works of mercy” outlined in Christian theology. He called

them “precise commands” given in Matthew 25 and a priority for Christians.

But while acts of mercy are considered an important part of the Christian life, Farmer went beyond this point and advocated two contro-

versial positions. First, he said that the corporal works find their “modern expression” in the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Second, he argued that churches, including the Episcopal Church, should support government-sponsored relief as opposed to private initiatives—including institutions such as church-run hospitals and schools. In doing so, he presented a liberal worldview that elevates corporate works of mercy at the state level above individual and religious organizations’ acts of mercy.

A High View of the MDGs

Farmer found no opposition to his high view of the MDGs in the House of Bishops. At its 2006 General Convention, the denomination approved

the MDGs as its main mission priority from 2006 to 2009. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said in a March 11 bulletin insert, “[h]elping the world achieve the MDGs is a concrete way we can live into [the] promises” of the church’s baptismal covenant.

Other Christians may agree that supporting the MDGs provides one way of obeying Jesus’ commands in Matthew 25. Still, many would hesitate to equate the MDGs with those works, as Farmer came close to doing. And many orthodox Episcopalians who support the MDGs fear that the Episcopal Church comes perilously close to confusing the MDGs with the Christian Gospel.

The Church’s Witness: to Support Government Programs

Farmer claimed there is an “iron triangle” consisting of charities promoting development assistance, the agricultural industry, and the shipping industry. He argued that privatization competes against the “common good” and creates profit for those within the “triangle,” thereby failing to be as effective in helping the needy as it should. He seemed to imply that it is inherently unjust to make any type of profit in helping the poor, even if the money gained either funds more charitable activity or is requested of the poor so as not to encourage handouts.

Farmer constructed an apologetic against development for his audience: “[T]he development machine is not sound ... including our allies [in the relief and development field].” Apparently aware that many would consider

Farmer presented a liberal worldview that elevates corporate works of mercy at the state level above individual and religious organizations’ acts of mercy.

GOVERNMENT-ONLY Dr. Paul Farmer chats with meeting attendees after his lecture. He argued that the Church should eschew private initiatives against poverty in favor of government-sponsored alternatives. (Ralph A. Webb/IRD)



Are Relief and Development Agencies Misguided?

Farmer's liberal advocacy of governmental solutions to the world's needs was controversial enough. Yet his most offensive and curious point was that relief agencies, particularly those that focus on third-world development, are hurting the poor more than helping them. Farmer sees such agencies as allied with two industries—the shipping industry and the agricultural industry—that he contends are making profit out of poverty. He also firmly believes that more people are helped by state solutions than private ones.

When asked by Anglican Action if microenterprise development agencies unintentionally work against the best interests of the poor, Farmer responded in the affirmative, adding that “[t]hey don’t always know it.” He talked about how some agencies buy food that then gets sold to the poor rather than freely given. This results in profits for the agricultural and shipping industries. Similarly, he said that more general relief agencies have the same problems. They “need reforming,” Farmer argued, although he added that even his Partners in Health organization needs ongoing reform to be more effective.

Responding to Farmer's assertions, Craig Cole, Director of Five Talents International, an Anglican microenterprise relief and development agency, agreed with the importance of public sector work, but not to the exclusion of the private sector. He told Anglican Action, “As Christians, we have an obligation to serve the poor and ... the churches are in a lot of ways the first responders in relief situations. The churches provide where other entities can't or won't. I think a mix of public, private, and religious organizations working together can make a big difference.”

Cole expressed a strong sense of importance and urgency relating to the Church's role in combating the issues addressed by the MDGs. “[W]e're the ones who should be coming up with the MDGs, not the government. The Church has been doing this for two thousand years now.”

Cole also believes that “[t]he world needs a ninth millennium development goal” of evangelism. In an opinion piece for the *Living Church* magazine, he commended the Episcopal Church's embrace of the MDGs but further questioned, “Why not set the goal that by 2015 a majority of the world's population will believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior because of the church's work among the poor?”

this viewpoint radical, Farmer cautioned the bishops, “Maybe we'll say [the development machine] is ‘flawed’ instead of ‘rotten,’ depending on the audience.”

Farmer expressed his belief that partnerships between U.S. dioceses and overseas dioceses or provinces are “problematic” at best. “What has happened in Latin America and Haiti is that this ‘thousand points of light’ approach has weakened public education and health care,” he bemoaned. “The churches and schools we're building are not actually helping the public structure, but hurting it.” He argued that when churches use their own methods to solve social problems instead of supporting government programs, they end up unintentionally “undermin[ing] the right of poor persons” to have access to clean water and other necessities.

As a positive alternative, Farmer claimed that many more individuals came for assistance in Haiti when churches and other organizations worked on state projects. He also claimed that public works increase the life span of individuals to a greater degree than private initiatives.

Throughout his presentation, Farmer constantly appealed to the bishops to act prophetically: “When the churches are united around ... social justice issues, their voices are very powerful,” he said. He

encouraged the bishops to speak against laws that adversely affect the poor, engage the pharmaceutical industry to promote practices more beneficial to the poor, and devote some of their energies to structural change.

The Effect on the Episcopal Church

It is unlikely that Farmer convinced many bishops to discourage Episcopalians from supporting relief agencies. The Episcopal Church has its own relief and development agency, Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD), which often partners with corporations to provide assistance around the world. For example, its anti-malaria Nets for Life program is sponsored by foundations that include the ExxonMobil Foundation and the Coca-Cola Africa Foundation.

Similarly, it is doubtful that Farmer's warning will discourage church initiatives outside of the public sector in other countries. The Episcopal Church's January 21 MDG bulletin insert praised the denomination's schools as fulfilling needs unmet by public schools: “In Honduras, the Episcopal Church's numerous bilingual schools provide top-quality instruction unavailable through [the nation's] strike-prone public school system.” The March 4 bulletin insert went further, with the Most Rev. H.W. Njongonkulu Ndungane, Primate of the

Church of the Province of Southern Africa, arguing that churches “often have networks where governments do not reach. In many African countries, faith groups provide an average of 40 [percent] of all health care.”

Nevertheless, Farmer's message of supporting government initiatives also fits in well with the Episcopal Church's constant public advocacy and work for structural change. “We advocate for U.S. trade and agriculture policies that respect the contexts, needs and resources of other countries, rather than increasing their dependency on us for aid and markets,” the February 25 bulletin insert said.

So while Farmer's urging of the Episcopal Church to steer its humanitarian efforts toward supporting state efforts undoubtedly will not convince the bishops to give up other programs, his views may influence the denomination to expand its support of state programs. That in turn means that the Episcopal Church's decidedly left-wing political action will continue to grow. ■



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

A Mixed Message from Elias Chacour

by James D. Berkley

One hesitates to quibble about the message of someone like Father Elias Chacour, a Melkite Catholic priest, now the Archbishop of Israel, of which he is a citizen. He has endured and accomplished much as a Palestinian Christian, yet he lacks most of the bitterness that some persons with his experience brandish like a badge of honor.

Folksy, often humorous, and delightfully Middle Eastern, Chacour spoke at the Presbyterian Global Fellowship conference in Houston in August. Much of what he said was excellent, and only some was tangentially troubling. What Chacour didn't say, however, was probably the most telling.

Much of what Chacour said was excellent, but what he didn't say was probably the most telling.

"I have a small problem with Israel," Chacour confessed. "Israel was created in my country, Palestine, when I was nine years old." And thus began his story about hardship and his response—the

same story told in his book *Blood Brothers*.

Welcome Parts of the Message

For those accustomed to hearing Israel and Palestine described with a politically hard-nosed, pro-Palestinian slant, Chacour's speech sported refreshing elements of generous candor, such as:

- "The Jews are human beings, and as such they are entitled to a homeland and freedom of expression."
- "The conflict that is still raging all over the Middle East about Palestinians or Israelis ... is about

identical claims of two nations on the same territory. Who is right? The one who has the courage to say, "The other one is also right."

- "We cannot accept and endorse suicide bombers."
- "If your friendship means to encourage us [Palestinians] to hate the Jews, to reject the Jews and not recognize them, that would make you one more enemy, and we do not need any more enemies."

Chacour's labor has been dogged and not without frustration and opposition. Yet he has kept plugging along with his ministry, without recrimination, hatred, or violence tainting his response. This is as refreshing as it is commendable.

Mixed and Troublesome Parts

The speech would have been stupendous, had Chacour remained so generous. But he allowed himself at times to traipse into statements that let his biases show. For example:

- "The [Israel-Palestine] problem started when the freedom of expression [Israelis] wanted for themselves started with them granting me no freedom of expression." That complaint appears a little overstated. Chacour is a citizen of Israel. He travels, speaks, writes, and teaches. While there may be some restrictions on freedom of expression in a country threatened by its neighbors all around, Chacour obviously is freer to criticize the Israeli government than his fellow Arabs in nations like Syria or Egypt would be to criticize their governments.



DOUBLE MESSAGE Father Elias Chacour's attempt at balance in his presentation of the Israel-Palestine conflict fell flat when he failed to give the complete context—including the hostility of neighboring Arab states to Israel, and the complex historical context leading to the creation of Israel. (James D. Berkley/IRD)

peoples over the centuries, the lack of an actual Palestinian state prior to 1947, the promises of a Jewish state long before the Holocaust, and much more. Even fellow Arabs have had a hand in exacerbating the Palestinians' misery.

- "I invite you all to be friends of the Palestinians. We welcome you to take our side. Why not? It's healthy. For once you would be on the right side." While Chacour wore a bemused smile while making this offer, he was actually contradicting

his statements previously about seeking peace and fairness all around for both sides.

Chacour's speech took on the feel of a generous "Ya gotta love the Jews!" with a gratuitous "even though they're the bad guys and we're the innocent victims" thrown in. It was a double message, pleasant at first taste, but with a hint of a bitter aftertaste.

The Message Left Unsaid

Chacour has expended his energy as a pastor, educator, and community builder. It's a great story, and he tells it with interest and even humor. But the story wasn't complete.

Nowhere, for instance, did Chacour speak about the actions and attitudes of Israel's Arab neighbors: how they have continually attempted to destroy Israel; how they encouraged the Palestinians to leave their villages in 1948 so as to facilitate war against Israel; how they have refused after three generations to assimilate the Palestinian refugees but prefer to keep them on display for political purposes; how their state media still regularly promulgate vicious anti-Jewish propaganda.

Nor did Chacour get into the complicated land-ownership situation prior to

the creation of Israel: how many Zionists had legally purchased land from Palestinian landowners; how laws were passed that made the sale of land to Jews punishable by death; and how many Palestinians who "just want to return to their land" did not own the land but were instead tenants, often victimized by their own people.

In no way did Chacour adequately explain the dire situation in 1967, when Israel found itself surrounded by hostile armies from countries far outnumbering its tiny population and bent on wiping the Jews off the map. Nor did he give any credence to the need today for a security barrier to protect Israelis from random and horrific terrorist attacks, and how that barrier has vastly reduced both Israeli and Palestinian deaths.

Chacour failed to adequately mention the willingness of Israel to give up land for peace: how Israel offered to return 98 percent of the land taken in the 1967 war, with compensation for the other 2 percent, and the offer was rejected by the late Palestinian President Arafat, or how Israel unilaterally cleared its settlements from Gaza. Nor did Chacour admit the failings of the Palestinian Authority government, ranging from thuggish corruption to the bloody hostilities between the Fatah and Hamas factions to the killing of Christian Palestinians.

Chacour's narrative carefully bypassed these troublesome aspects of Palestinian reality, concentrating instead only on injustices committed by the government of Israel. An incomplete telling of a story is not a basically honest telling. So while Chacour's talk was welcome and refreshing because it didn't wax hostile, it was ultimately disappointing because it was neither revealing nor complete. ❏



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

- "The country [the Jews] wanted for themselves meant that my people became refugees.... How can I agree? And that is the core of the problem of Palestinians and Jews." Yes, one group got displaced for another sixty years ago, and the displacement continues today with Israeli settlements on the West Bank. Yet it is hardly a one-way street. As many Arab Palestinians fled their longtime homes inside what became Israel, hundreds of thousands of Jews were forced to abandon their centuries-old communities in places like Baghdad, Damascus, Alexandria, and the West Bank. Such displacements are a sad reality throughout history. Ask Scottish Presbyterians removed from the highlands of Scotland!
- "We [Palestinians] have lost everything. Why? Because our Jewish brothers and sisters were persecuted in barbarous ways in Europe, and we had to pay the bill." Chacour attributes Israel's statehood simply to the Holocaust. But that narrative doesn't tell the whole story. Among the crucial facts omitted: the continuous presence of a Jewish community for millennia, the movements of Arabs and other

Presbyterian Leaders Confirm IRD Emphases

by James D. Berkley

For years, Presbyterian Action has advocated that “the most powerful message the church can deliver to any society is simply the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” And during those years, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has often wandered all over the map with its social witness message, often straying far from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps now, church leaders are finally coalescing on Presbyterian Action’s message.

Meeting in Louisville in mid-September, the elected General Assembly Council (GAC) was joined by presbytery and synod executives and other leaders from across the country. These national and regional leaders were polled about what the denomination’s communications strategy ought to entail.

Questions from a New Communications Director

Just last March, the GAC had confirmed Karen Schmidt, a corporate communications specialist, as the Deputy Director for Communications and Funds Development. The lack of adequate denominational communications had driven the GAC to seek a communications physician to propose a cure for ailments such as a lack of trust, funds drying up, abysmal ignorance of the work of national agencies, and shock expressed by those who did get wind of what was going on.

One of Schmidt’s first major responsibilities was to devise a comprehensive communications strategy. Thus, at this fall meeting, Schmidt outlined classic communication theory like an alliterative preacher, providing a lengthy list of “C” words that denoted what she described as “Laws of Communication”: clarity, consistent, credible, courteous, complete, correct, concise, coherent, coordinated, customer-focused, creative, culture, cross-cultural, and change.

Then Schmidt worked the crowd

Results from the Communications Poll

- Who is doing the talking? The whole denomination (90); All General Assembly agencies (21); One’s own specific agency (12)
- Who are we? The church (110); Religious organization that does charitable work (3); Faith-based charitable organization (1)
- Who is doing the listening? Middle governing body executives (0); Pastors (0); Pastors plus staff (0); Pastors plus staff plus elders and deacons (27); Members/people in the pew (98); The unchurched/nonmembers (13)
- What are our prioritized goals (the number who made an item their #1 or #2 priority)? Foster/improve a climate of trust (78); Engage to empower/drive support (58); Increase a sense of connectedness (44); Grow membership and worship attendance (31); Increase awareness (25); Develop related networks across congregations, presbyteries, synods, and GAC (18); Increase advocacy for PC(USA) GAC mission by clergy/church leaders (16)

to get a better handle on what it is these key leaders expect and truly want as communication. She polled the approximately 125 leaders on a number of forced-response questions, asking them to vote for their favored response among several viable options. The room cooperated enthusiastically, and the responses indicate informally what these regional executives and national GAC leaders want most.

What Do Church Leaders Want?

These Presbyterian leaders mainly want to speak as a true church, for the whole church, to the church members. They seek to foster greater trust, gain increased support, and build a sense of connectedness.

These results are significant. They suggest that, in general, the leaders don’t particularly want to speak as some marginally religious social agency. Nor do they want to speak as any one Presbyterian entity or program. Nor primarily to pastors and other leaders. And most interesting to Presbyterian Action, the leaders don’t particularly want to speak as the voice for a single “prophetic” (meaning progressive) viewpoint.

Instead, these leaders want to present a united voice, as a body of faith, to the people of the church, to restore confidence and reassurance in place of the divisive troubles that are driving people from the churches

and crippling Presbyterian ministry.

Interestingly, the participants clearly voiced preferences remarkably similar to the counsel Presbyterian Action has given for years. For instance, Presbyterian Action states that “in saying ‘yes’ to the Gospel, the church must say ‘no’ to any other ideology that would replace the Gospel or divert us from it.” Apparently these church leaders agree that first the organization is to be a robust church, not just a faith-based or charitable organization.

Presbyterian Action believes that “church pronouncements about partisan political issues should be made rarely, tentatively, and with full respect for others who reach different conclusions about the best means of pursuing the principles of the Gospel.” The church leaders polled highest for fostering trust and gaining support, and lowest for creating networks and increasing advocacy.

Yes! Presbyterian Action, which has stood for years on the ground to which the Presbyterian hierarchy appears to be arriving, welcomes its new companions. 📞



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

Presbyterian News

Changes Coming to General Assembly in June

Presbyterians gathering June 21–28 in San Jose, California, for the next General Assembly will be greeted by change. In October, the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) discussed ways to alter the General Assembly.

First, there will be 220-some additional commissioners, a greater than 40 percent increase over the 534 commissioners at the 2006 assembly. The commissioners will be divided into additional committees to deal with business. Oddly, two such committees will be “lab committees,” assigned mock business to be handled experimentally through alternative forms of decision making as part of a questionable shift away from parliamentary procedure.

Watch for a new booklet to explain “discernment.” The staff-produced booklet is intended to stand alongside the classic booklet *Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* by the late Marianne Wolfe, which, ironically, makes a brilliant and compelling argument against consensus decision making, because of the way it runs roughshod over the rights of a minority opinion.

Other changes presently being considered include:

- Making unanimous committee votes the final assembly action. In 2006, 62 percent of the business items received unanimous committee votes. Of those, nearly 100 were taken up in plenary, rather than being placed on a consent agenda.
- Limiting business “to focus on what’s important.” But who decides the significance of business items? And would it be fair for grassroots overtures and commissioner resolutions to be further limited, while reports from staff and entities abound?

The changes, if enacted, would

appear to make an Assembly less purely democratic and more susceptible to manipulation. ☒

A Major Governance Overhaul?

For more than a year, the Form of Government Task Force has been busy writing a briefer, sketchier constitutional foundation for the Presbyterian way of doing church. The proposed new *Form of Government* released on September 19 would provide enormous latitude.

This fall, both the General Assembly Council (GAC) and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) entertained representatives from the task force and offered preliminary feedback. Both entities appeared reflexively inclined to go along with the radical rewrite, although both expressed some reservations.

In September, the GAC wrestled with the big changes the new Form of Government would introduce. Council members questioned whether anyone—themselves included—would be able to digest the scores of detailed changes prior to a vote in June. Thus, they counseled waiting until at least 2010 for a decision.

In October, COGA seemed more interested in tinkering with the proposed draft to eliminate “deal killers.” Both Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and Associated Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons suggested finding the hot buttons and eliminating them. “Without doing that, there is no way you can move this forward,” warned Kirkpatrick.

Cindy Bolbach, task force co-chair, boiled the revision down to its essence: “We said that presbyteries can make their own rules. Okay, do we all trust presbyteries to make the right decision?” From the uncertain looks on COGA faces, the answer was probably a tentative no.

Yet, oddly enough, both GAC and COGA appear destined to promote the new *Form of Government*. However, understanding the Reformed concept of the

need to restrain evil, Presbyterian Action counsels reservation about the proposed revision. ☒

Presbyterian Stated Clerk Bows Out

On September 10, Clifton Kirkpatrick announced his decision to step down from his position as Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at the conclusion of his term of office in June 2008. Kirkpatrick will bring to a close 12 years of service as Stated Clerk during a long period of denominational decline and uncertainty. The Stated Clerk is responsible for the Office of the General Assembly, which conducts the ecclesiastical work of the church.

In March, the Presbyterian Action Steering Committee had been prominent in requesting that Kirkpatrick not seek a fourth term, arguing that “the disheartening state of our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) indicates the need for leadership change in the position of Stated Clerk of the General Assembly.” Evidently, Kirkpatrick agreed.

“I commend Clifton Kirkpatrick for his characteristic graciousness in displaying the courage to step aside to allow new leadership to emerge,” commented Presbyterian Action Director Jim Berkley. “The last decade under his leadership has been a difficult and disappointing time for Kirkpatrick, and indeed for Presbyterians as a whole. By pulling the plug on any potential incumbency now, Kirkpatrick is allowing other able leaders to step up to guide this denomination once again into greater biblical fidelity and increased effectiveness as a Christian body.”

“I appreciate Clifton Kirkpatrick’s Christian faith, enthusiastic ministry, and kindhearted humility,” Berkley added. “I look forward to a more fulfilling future, both for him and for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” ☒

2007: A Year of Success for IRD

by David P. Sheaffer

I was looking back over the last year since rejoining the team at the Institute on Religion & Democracy and was encouraged to see all that we have been up to in 2007. Below are just a few of the highlights from this past year.

Hosted a Press Conference and released a book, *Strange Yokefellows*, to expose the growing dependence of the National Council of Churches (NCC) on liberal foundation support

In early January, IRD held a press conference to expose how the NCC is now receiving more funding from liberal foundations than the very churches it purports to represent. While NCC General Secretary Bob Edgar boasted of the success of this strategy, by October the NCC cut another 14 positions to address a significant deficit reflecting a far different reality.

Reminded politicians that an orthodox understanding of the Christian faith should not prevent individuals from serving the nation

James Holsinger, President Bush's nominee for Surgeon General, has received criticism from politicians, gay-rights groups, and some liberal Christians because of his work within the United Methodist Church defending the church's position that prohibits active homosexuals from serving as pastors. While the IRD has not taken a position on his nomination, we believe the decision should be based on his medical and public health record. We do not believe that an orthodox faith should bar one from service to the nation.

Challenged an Episcopal priest who believes she can be both a devout Christian and a devout Muslim

The Rev. Ann Holmes Redding, a priest in

Seattle, WA, has decided that she can pray to Allah on Friday and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ on Sunday. Redding was inhibited by her bishop, the Rt. Rev. Geralyn Wolf of the Diocese of Rhode Island, and is currently taking an imposed sabbatical to discern her calling. The IRD commended Wolf's pastoral and disciplinary measure. Conversely, the IRD criticized the bishop of the Diocese of Olympia (the diocese where Redding was serving) for voicing approval of Redding's dual faiths.

Through the book *Girl Soldier*, shed light on the plight of thousands of children who have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda

IRD staffer Faith McDonnell co-authored this book and helped spread the word in places like the Christian music festival Rock the Desert in Texas, through a book signing on Capitol Hill, and on numerous radio programs—explaining tangible ways individuals can help the Ugandan victims.

Supported the right of the Ocean Grove Campground Association to refuse permission for a same-sex union ceremony on its property

The campground, founded as a Methodist retreat center, stood up for United Methodist teachings affirming sexual relations only within the marriage of one man and one woman. It therefore denied a request by a lesbian couple to celebrate a same-sex union in the campground pavilion. The IRD believes this is more than just about marriage; it is about the freedom of a religious organization to uphold its own beliefs and establish policies for its own property.

Speaking up for the value of human life while testifying before the Senate

IRD President Jim Tonkowich testified before a Senate committee to express our concerns about radical elements within the environmental movement. Many environmentalists, blind to the value of human life, see humans as the primary issue in environmental degradation, and as a result advocate population control as a solution. Unfortunately, those solutions often mean advocating for abortion on demand and sterilization, frequently among the world's poorest groups. In response, Tonkowich asserted, "We believe that 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."

Balanced Middle East teaching materials for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

As the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) focused on the Middle East this spring, the denomination's official materials offered a view of the Israel-Palestine conflict with a decidedly pro-Palestinian slant. IRD's Presbyterian Action offered a positive alternative for those congregations desiring a more balanced perspective on the conflict.

A special word of thanks goes out to everyone who has helped make all this, and so much more, possible over the past year. We appreciate your partnership and look forward to standing with you in 2008. 📧



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

A Door Closed, a Door Opened

by Nalani E. Hilderman

As of 5 o'clock today, this office will be closing its doors for good" I sat in stunned silence as my boss delivered the news that our board of directors had decided to close our organization after 11 years of successful ministry in Washington, DC. Losing a job rather unexpectedly has a tendency to throw anyone into a tailspin, especially someone like me—a planner who likes to have everything laid out. Within just a few minutes of receiving that news, my mind turned to the bigger questions: God, what do I do now? Where do I go? How can I survive financially? I knew that the coming days would not be easy.

The last time I had been in such a situation, I had recently graduated from Baylor University with my master's degree in history and desired to move to Washington, DC, to begin full-time employment. I spent many nights lying awake, anxiety creeping into my mind and my heart as I struggled to trust and believe that God would provide. In the end, God abundantly provided, and I came to DC, working for almost two years at a wonderful Christian ministry.

However, when I heard those words from my boss six months ago, I knew I

would be entering into another anxiety-filled period. By God's grace, I thoroughly enjoyed the first six weeks of my unemployment—I slept late, stayed up late, read several novels, and had lunch with my friends in the city. I had already planned a vacation to visit my family in California and then to attend a friend's wedding in St. Louis, MO. I believed full well that I would have a new job lined up by the time I arrived back from that trip in mid July. The vacation came and went, and I still had nothing that looked promising. As the weeks passed I began to waver more often in my trust and question if God had forgotten about me.

I knew all along that God had given me unique talents and interests, and I fought daily to keep "dreaming big" about a new place to work. After nearly three and a half months, I received an email about an open position at the Institute on Religion & Democracy. I had not heard of the IRD, but was intrigued as soon as I visited the website. After submitting my resumé and having two interviews, I knew that working with the IRD was the answer to my summer-long prayers about the next step for my life.

The realization came not just from

the sense of peace and excitement I had when I met the IRD staff, but also through seeing how the IRD was a wonderful fit for ideas that had fascinated me for many years. I have been a believer since my childhood, and God has provided me with many experiences and opportunities to think about the role of the church in American society, both historically and in the present. Much of my education in college and graduate school centered on American religious history. I am constantly intrigued in discovering how Christianity has been influential in shaping this nation. The IRD is a wonderful place to keep growing and learning about the Church. I am already enjoying my experience serving with the IRD, and I look forward to many more opportunities to help the Church be the "salt of the earth and the light of the world." 📖



Nalani E. Hilderman is a Senior Executive 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:

- You must be at least 70 ½ at the time of the charitable distribution.
- You may distribute up to \$100,000 for the 2007 tax year.
- Distributions must be made directly from the trustee/administrator of your IRA to a qualifying public charity (you cannot receive the distribution prior to giving to the charity), such as the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

This may benefit you if:

- You don't itemize your tax deductions.
- You live in a state that doesn't permit tax deductions for charitable donations.
- You itemize your taxes and you have reached the charitable giving limit.
- Your tax deductions decrease as your taxable income increases.

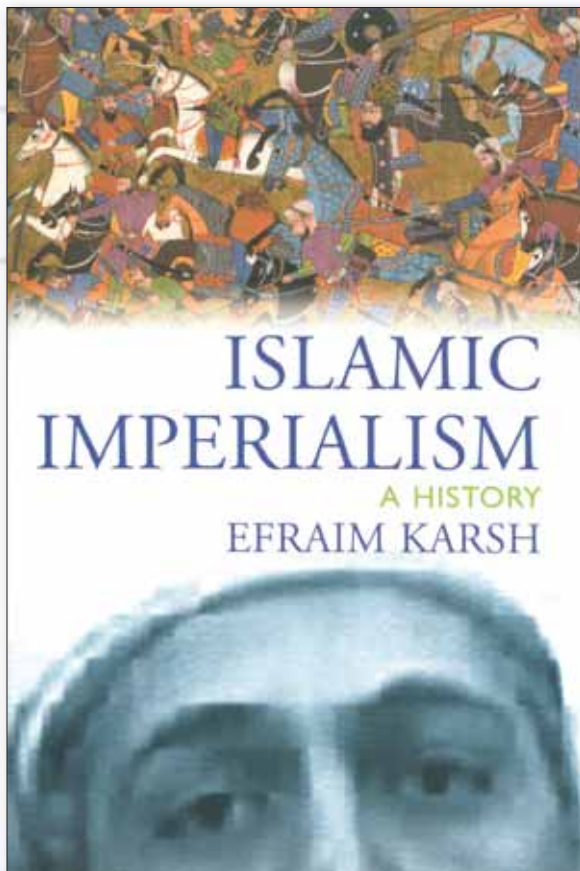
Please consult your professional advisor regarding this new charitable IRA provision to determine if this is a good option for your situation.

Questions?

Contact David Sheaffer, 202.904.6195, davids@ird-renew.org.

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