



# faith & freedom

*Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness*

June 2008

## One Dream: A Free China

*The 2008 Olympics Offer an Opportunity to Shine a Light on China's Human Rights Record*



### ALSO INSIDE:

- ▶ UCC Makes Lemonade from Obama-Wright Connection
- ▶ Presbyterians May Halt Missionary Erosion





# Contents

## Features

### 8 UCC Makes Lemonade from Obama-Wright Connection

by Alan F. H. Wisdom

While Sen. Barack Obama distanced himself from the Rev. Jeremiah Wright's more incendiary remarks, the UCC was proud to claim him as one of its own.



### 10 One Dream: A Free China

by Faith J. H. McDonnell

As the Olympic Games draw closer, China's human rights record is receiving increased scrutiny. China's abuses, however, go far beyond repression in Tibet.



## Programs

**Presbyterian Action** ..... James D. Berkley

16 **Presbyterians May Halt Missionary Erosion**

18 **Presbyterian Action Challenges Entrenched Special Interests**

**UMAction** ..... Mark D. Tooley

20 **Lake Junaluska Conference Promotes Pacifism** ..... John S. A. Lomperis

22 **Do United Methodist Bishops Really Value Christian Unity?** ..... John S. A. Lomperis

## Articles

3 **From the President: Not Just Tolerance, but Liberty** ..... James W. Tonkovich

12 **Religious Activists Accuse United States of Pro-Torture Policy** ..... Rebekah M. Sharpe

13 **The Papal Visit** ..... James W. Tonkovich

14 **Climate Change Roils Southern Baptists** ..... Alan F. H. Wisdom

15 **Baby, It's Cold Outside (And It May Be Getting Colder)** ..... James W. Tonkovich

19 **Anglican Action: Judge Recognizes Split among Anglicans** ..... Erik R. Nelson

23 **IRD Diary: A Different Kind of Education** ..... Dan Anderson

faith & freedom

VOLUME 27 NUMBER 3



The Institute on Religion & Democracy

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

### PRESIDENT

James W. Tonkovich

### EDITORIAL

Alan F. H. Wisdom  
Executive Editor,

Vice President for Research and Programs

Erik R. Nelson  
Managing Editor

Loralei G. Coyle  
Director of Communications

### STAFF

James D. Berkley  
Director of Presbyterian Action

Nalani E. Hilderman  
Senior Executive Assistant

John S. A. Lomperis  
Research Associate

Faith J. H. McDonnell  
Director of Religious Liberty Programs

Steve R. Rempe  
Website Coordinator

David P. Sheaffer  
Director of Development

Rebekah M. Sharpe  
Administrative Assistant

Mark D. Tooley  
Director of UMAction

Jerald H. Walz  
Vice President for Operations

Jeffrey H. Walton  
Communications Manager

**COVER** Activists protest the Chinese government's treatment of Tibetans. The 2008 Beijing Olympics have increased scrutiny of China's minorities, primarily Tibetans. China's persecution of Christians has received less attention. (Churnsak Kanoknan/Getty Images)

# Not Just Tolerance, but Liberty

by James W. Tonkowich

Most people would agree that the world would be a better place if every country agreed to religious toleration. But in the April 2008 issue of *Touchstone* magazine, human rights scholar William Saunders makes the surprising argument that religious toleration, rather than being a national virtue, is a source of martyrdom as surely as religious coercion is.

Toleration, argues Saunders, is based on the assumption that while religion may be an unavoidable part of human life, religion is, nonetheless, dangerous and needs to be controlled. That control may mean allowing only certain religions legal status or even imposing a single religion, as is the case in Saudi Arabia with Islam or in North Korea with atheism.

Saunders illustrates this by quoting John Shattuck who served as Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor in the Clinton administration. In a 2002 speech Shattuck said:

Freedom of religion is predicated upon the existence of more than one religion. But a multiplicity of religions has always meant conflict, and religious conflict often led to war and human devastation. This was the state of reality for centuries and millennia, and it is hardly a ringing endorsement of religious freedom.

According to Saunders, Shattuck argued that religious toleration rather than religious freedom is a “strategic necessity” and is “necessary for the internal protection of religion itself.”

Saunders comments:

While Shattuck noted some true points, he missed the mark. He, and the philosophical liberalism he represents, sees religion, unlike other human rights, as a problem, as a source of conflict, as something to be managed.

And when religion is seen as a danger, something to be tolerated and managed, it will inevitably be selectively suppressed. This is plainly the case in China, site of the 2008 Olympics and subject of this *Faith & Freedom's* cover story.

On September 10, 2007, two Chinese human rights activists, Hu Jai and Teng Biao, wrote an open letter titled “The Real China and the Olympics” for which Hu Jai is now in prison. In it they cited examples of China seeking to manage religion.

In 2005, a Beijing pastor, Cai Zhuohua, was sentenced to three years for printing Bibles. Zhou Heng, a house church pastor in Xinjiang, was charged with running an “illegal operation” for receiving dozens of boxes of Bibles. From April to June 2007, China expelled over 100 suspected U.S., South Korean, Canadian, Australian, and other missionaries. Among them were humanitarian workers and language educators who had been teaching English in China for 15 years. During this so-called “Typhoon 5” campaign, authorities took aim at missionary activities so as to

prevent their recurrence during the Olympics.

The authors also note the suppression of Buddhism in Tibet. This includes a strange new law that “all reincarnated lamas to be approved by Chinese authorities.” How that is possible is not clear, but China has decided that reincarnated lamas are dangerous. Thus, the thinking goes, there is a need for control by approval and toleration. The body count in Tibet, from Saunders’s point of view, rises predictably.

The U.S. Department of Justice website states: “Religious liberty is often referred to as the ‘First Freedom’ because the Framers placed it first in the Bill of Rights. Yet it is not merely first in order: it is a fundamental freedom on which so many of our other freedoms rest.” What, after all, can be the meaning or value of economic freedom or freedom of assembly or freedom of speech if our spirits are not free to worship or reject ultimate spiritual reality? All human rights are important, but religious liberty is the foundation of all the rest.

As to the question of religiously motivated violence, Allen Hertzke wrote in *Freeing God’s Children*:

... acknowledging the sins of religion does not mean that religious freedom should be less vigorously promoted than other human rights. Rather, promoting it will further protect minority faiths from the abuses of state power.

The “sins of religion” are not caused by too much religious freedom, but by too little. Christians who died at the hands of the Roman Empire, Tibetan Buddhists who die at the hands of the Communist Chinese, and the victims of *jihadi* Islamic terrorism suffered and continue to suffer because of a philosophy that considers religion—or at least some religions—dangerous and in need of regulation if not outright suppression.

Are there limits to religious freedom? Certainly. Human sacrifice and child abuse are illegitimate religious expressions. But as any good lawyer knows, “Tough cases make bad laws.” Rather than begin with tough cases, we need to begin with the simple fact that in China, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Russia, France, the United States, and every other nation of the world, religious liberty—a law written into God’s relationship with humans—must be the law of the land. 📖

*Jim Tonkowich*



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



## International Briefs

### Government Closes Over Half of Protestant Churches in Algeria

A crackdown on religious proselytism and the renewed enforcement of a 2006 law have resulted in the closing of 26 of the 50 Protestant churches in the North African nation of Algeria, Compass Direct reports.

In February 2006, the Algerian government passed a law requiring non-Muslim congregations to obtain a permit to hold worship services, and barring the publication of materials intended to “shake the faith of a Muslim.” The law went largely unenforced until November 2007, when several media outlets began reporting on purported efforts by evangelicals to “Christianize” the nation, which is 99 percent Muslim.

“It would be better that authorities give us the possibility to be in conformity with the law and not order us to close the churches,” said Pastor Mustapha Krim, president of the Protestant Church of Algeria.

Explaining the closing of a church in Tizi Ouzou, Religious Affairs Minister Bu ‘Abdallah Ghoulamullah told reporters, “They are trying to establish a minority, which might give foreign powers a pretext to intervene with Algeria’s domestic affairs.”

Prosecution of proselytism is a violation of United Nations covenants affirming the rights to publicly manifest one’s religion and to change one’s religion. 📖

### Christians Respond to Zimbabwe Elections

Religious leaders in Zimbabwe responded to delays in the release of that nation’s presidential election results, urging electoral officials to publicly release the final outcome to counter any perception of electoral impropriety.

On March 29, Zimbabweans took part in elections to select presidential and parliamentary representation. For the first time since the nation obtained full

### Saudi King Calls for Dialogue with World’s Monotheistic Leaders

In a surprise statement, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz has announced his desire to convene a summit of “believers of the three main religions: the Torah, the Bible, and the Quran.”

Expressing dismay at the disintegrating family unit and the growth of atheism, King Abdullah called for “conferences between religions to protect humanity from folly” during a televised speech in Riyadh on March 25.

Abdullah said he mentioned the idea to Pope Benedict XVI when visiting Vatican City in November 2007. “He met me in a meeting I will not forget—a meeting of one human being with another,” the king said. “I suggested this idea.”

Christian and Jewish leaders have expressed guarded optimism about the prospects of such a conference. Rabbi Eric Yoffie of the Union for Reform Judaism called the proposal a “dramatic and important development,” while Michael Cromartie of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said the prospect of religious leaders taking part in such a meeting “can only help. It’s a courageous thing for the king to do.”

Despite the suggested initiative by Abdullah, Saudi Arabia retains heavy restrictions on non-Muslim religious practice. Abdullah has yet to grant a request by Pope Benedict to build the first Christian church in the country. 📖

AFP Photo/HO/SPA



**OPEN FOR DIALOGUE?** Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz mentioned the idea of dialogue to Pope Benedict XVI while visiting the Vatican. Christian and Jewish leaders are guardedly optimistic.

independence in 1980, parties in opposition to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Party (ZANU-PF) obtained a majority in parliament. However, results of the presidential election were long delayed, causing some observers to postulate that President Robert Mugabe is attempting to maintain power by non-democratic means.

“The slow and seemingly stage-managed release of Zimbabwe’s election results raises concerns,” said a statement from the South African Council of Churches. “Everything possible must be done to ensure that democratic processes are credible, legitimate, and acceptable to the voters.”

The Rev. Ishmael Noko, a Zimbabwe-

an theologian and general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, also called for the release of the results, specifically criticizing the sitting president and his party. “By failing to act affirmatively for the release of the election results, the government and the ruling party are responsible for the lack of information and the accompanying tensions and suspicions. The result is a deepening lack of trust in President Mugabe and his government,” he said.

Mugabe maintains the support of the former Anglican bishop of central Africa, Nolbert Kunonga, who has exalted the strongman as a prophet. “To us he is a prophet of God who was sent to deliver the people of Zimbabwe from bondage,”

the bishop said in a speech to supporters prior to the election. “God raised him to acquire our land and distribute it to Zimbabweans.”

### Christian Cemetery in Sudan Now a Used Car Lot

A report from a World Council of Churches delegation to Sudan reveals that a Christian cemetery in the capital city of Khartoum has been “taken over” by other people who are using the land for a used car dealership and a livestock market.

“I was shocked when I learnt that a livestock market was profaning a place that should be sacred,” said Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

The delegation was in Sudan from March 26 through April 3 to visit the various regions of the war-torn country.

“We will not rest until we have the cemetery back,” said the Rev. Peter Tibi, General Secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches. “God has not stopped people from dying, and they need to be buried. Time and patience are running out.”

In response to complaints from church officials, the livestock were relocated, only to be replaced by a market for used automobiles.

Speaking generally of the plight of Christians in Sudan, Kobia assured an audience in the South Sudan capital of Juba of the WCC’s support: “Just as we were with you during the struggle for peace and freedom, we also want to be with you at this time.”

### Former Catholic Bishop Elected President of Paraguay

A former Roman Catholic bishop campaigning on a platform of aiding the poor was elected president of Paraguay on April 20, ending six decades of single-party control in the South American country.

Fernando Lugo, formerly bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Pedro, received 41 percent of the popular vote, defeating Blanca Ovelar of the ruling Colorado Party by 10 percentage points. Lugo becomes the first non-Colorado Party presidential candidate to win election in Paraguay in 61 years.

Known to his supporters as “the bishop of the poor,” Lugo promised to provide support to the indigent in the country of 6.1 million through income redistribution and land reforms. Lugo is also known as “the red bishop” for his support for left-leaning liberation theology.

Lugo resigned his post as bishop in 2006 prior to beginning his campaign for the presidency. The Vatican refused his resignation, claiming that his vocation as priest was a “freely accepted lifetime commitment,” but suspended him from performing priestly duties. Vatican officials are now examining the possibility of removing Lugo from the priesthood.

The Rev. Samuel Kobia, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, has publicly congratulated Lugo on his victory. “We have been moved by your statements, both during the election campaign and after being elected, that reflect the rich tradition of a Latin American Christianity that has struggled to follow Jesus amidst a reality marked by inequality and injustice,” said Kobia in an open letter to Lugo released on April 30.

### Pope Baptizes Former Muslim Journalist

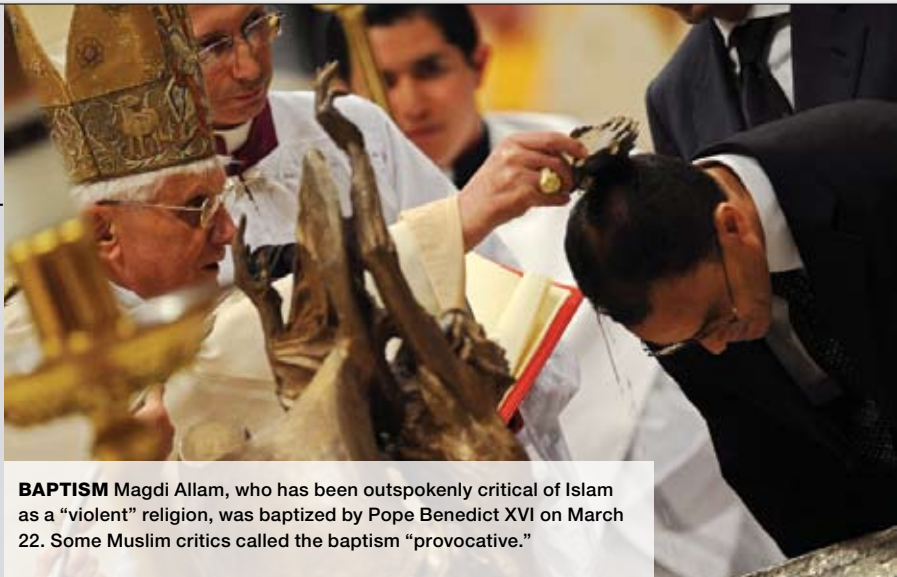
Magdi Allam, a Muslim convert to Christianity and critic of Islamic oppression, was baptized by Pope Benedict XVI at the Easter vigil mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica on March 22.

Allam, a columnist for the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper in Milan, was born in Cairo, Egypt. Despite being raised Muslim, he attended a Roman Catholic school in Egypt, later moving to Italy for his university studies.

“In my first Easter as a Christian, I discovered not only Jesus, but for the first time the true and One God, who is the God of faith and of reason,” Allam wrote in his newspaper column. In the same article, he described Islam as “physiologically violent and historically conflictive.”

Muslim critics of Allam have protested the public nature of the baptism. “The Pope is provoking the indignation of Muslims by baptizing a former Muslim who supports Israel and who is well known for his aversion to Islam,” said an editorial in the international Arab newspaper *Al Quds*.

Christophe Simon/AFP Photo



**BAPTISM** Magdi Allam, who has been outspokenly critical of Islam as a “violent” religion, was baptized by Pope Benedict XVI on March 22. Some Muslim critics called the baptism “provocative.”



## Church News

### ELCA Completes Draft Study on Sexuality

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the nation's largest Lutheran body, has released a draft of its long-expected statement on human sexuality. The product of lengthy discussion by a task force, the densely written document is being submitted for consideration during the 4.8 million-member denomination's 2009 Churchwide Assembly. It requires a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote to pass.

The proposed statement does not take strong positions on controversial questions of sexual morality. It sets outer limits in rejecting "non-monogamous, promiscuous, and transient sexual relationships or casual sexual encounters." But it fails to draw a bright line between the marriage of man and woman and all other sexual relationships, as traditional Christian morality has done. Regarding homosexuality, the draft asserts that "this church does not have consensus regarding loving and committed same-gender relationships."

Lutherans have been struggling with human sexuality issues for some time. Controversy was recently re-ignited by an openly homosexual pastor in Atlanta who was removed from clergy roles in a disciplinary action, as well as a Chicago-area lesbian who was recently ordained.

Congregations and individuals are being asked by the task force to study the draft and make comments and suggestions by November. 📖

### Pew Forum Releases Study on the Status of Religion in America

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently released an extensive new study of the religious affiliations of Americans. The study is the result of interviews with some 35,000 Americans and reports on the dynamics of religion in America. Most notably, the study shows that there is a great deal of fluctuation in the American religious landscape.

### Ted Turner Joins Churches in Fighting Malaria

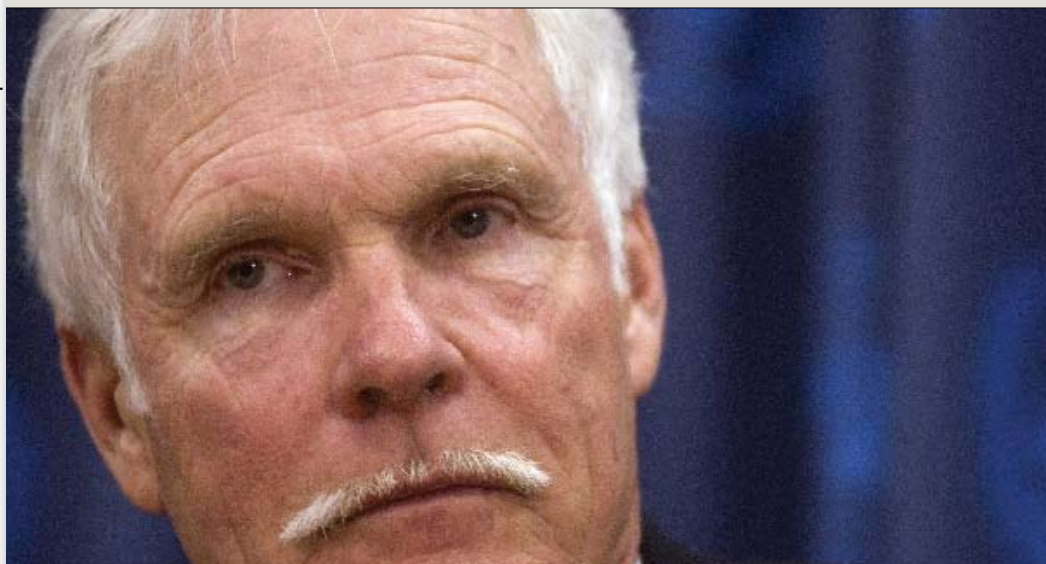
The founder of CNN, who once labeled Christianity a "religion for losers," has decided to put his past feelings behind him and join forces with three large denominations to fight malaria deaths in Africa. Ted Turner launched a \$200 million partnership in April with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and the United Methodist Church.

Both Turner's United Nations Foundation and the Protestant groups have been working on anti-malaria projects for some time, but the new project is substantially more ambitious, with United Methodists aiming to raise \$100 million and Lutherans aiming to raise a combined \$75–100 million.

Turner says he no longer considers himself an agnostic or atheist and regrets his former negative comments about Christianity.

"The religious community is huge and has a very good reputation for being able to mobilize resources," Turner told the Associated Press. "Why not use them and be thankful?" 📖

John Smock/Sipa Press



**TURNED AROUND** Ted Turner, the founder of CNN, has expressed regret for his negative comments about Christianity and has embraced religious activists in the fight against malaria.

Chief among the developments is the current state of the Catholic Church in America. While the percentage of the nation that is Catholic has remained steady over the course of the last generation (about 24 percent), the composition of the church has shifted away from American-born Catholics. About one-third of Americans who were raised Catholic no longer claim that identity. The overwhelming majority of those

who have arisen to take their place are foreign-born Catholics, mostly of Latino descent.

Though the study emphasizes diversity and fluidity, it is striking to note that nearly 80 percent of Americans still self-describe as Christian. While there is much talk of the growth of Islam in America, Muslims are less numerous than Buddhists and still make up less than one percent of the overall population. 📖

## California Home Schooling Under Fire

California courts have decided to reopen a controversial home schooling case that threatened to end the widespread practice in the nation's largest state.

The Los Angeles-based Second District Court of Appeals had ruled on February 28 that parents must have teaching credentials to home school their children. If not, children would be required to attend public or private school.

In the February 28 written opinion, Justice H. Walter Croskey said that parents do not have a constitutional right to home school their children. That opinion was subsequently put on hold as the Court of Appeals agreed to re-open the case for another hearing in June. Conservative groups such as the Alliance Defense Fund and the Home School Legal Defense Association had strongly protested the original decision. The case originated from an allegation of child abuse within a single family and was not intended to be a ruling on all home schooling, according to the *Christian Post*.

According to the Pacific Justice Institute, there are as many as 166,000 California students who are home schooled. 📖

## Ecumenical Advocacy Days

The religious left's annual gathering near Washington, DC, convened with a rallying cry of anti-war, environmental and welfare state causes. Ecumenical Advocacy Days, an event sponsored by the National Council of Churches (NCC), was also hosted by United Methodist agencies along with other mainline Protestant groups, left-wing Roman Catholic orders, and Jim Wallis's Sojourners.

One star this year was Menonite "professor of peacebuilding" Lisa Schirch, who told her applauding audience that America's "exploitative" economic agreements with poor nations create the humiliation and frustration that lead to terrorism.

Schirch insisted that Iraq's only hope "is an economic solution and a political solution. Security does not land with a helicopter; it grows from the ground up."

Schirch did not mention al Qaeda, Iranian meddling, Islamist ambitions, or sectarian hatred as primary obstacles to peace in Iraq. According to Schirch, the main problem is American consumerism and greed, which propelled Americans into Iraq so as to ensure ready oil sources. The argument assumes anger around world toward Americans who live sumptuously thanks to oil and cheap goods facilitated by unfair trade agreements that benefit the United States. "Until Americans change their lifestyle, we will need a military presence around the world," Schirch lamented. 📖

## Evangelical Leaders Endorse 'Reconciliation Referendum'

Sen. Barack Obama's (D-IL) recent speech on race relations, given in response to the scandal over his former pastor's racially charged sermons, has produced a critical response, this time from a group of evangelical pastors.

"While politicians like Barack Obama and the national media wring their hands over a problem that has

persisted in this country nearly 400 years, they offer no solutions to the problem," said the statement, signed by Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship; the Rev. Richard Cizik, vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Bishop Harry Jackson, founder of the High Impact Leadership Coalition; Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council; and Alveda King, an anti-abortion activist and niece of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The signatories said the church needs to do more to address race relations—including prayer, interracial evangelism, and poverty.

According to Religion News Service, the statement was presented to Christian leaders at a recent meeting in Montgomery, AL, hosted by the Call, a multid denominational movement focused on reconciliation and revival.

"The failure of good Christian people to provide a clear and convincing example of racial unity within the church has contributed to the divide between the races in the nation and it only appears to be widening," the evangelical leaders said in the statement. "We must recognize that racism is not just a social problem in America. It is also a spiritual problem." 📖

## Outrageous Quote

**"By calling ourselves progressive, we mean we are Christians who recognize the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the way to God's realm, and acknowledge that their ways are true for them, as our ways are true for us."**

—Taken from a "welcome statement" for churches participating in "Pluralism Sunday," a celebration of "our interfaith world" sponsored by the Center for Progressive Christianity. Organizers state that progressive Christians "thank God for religious diversity! We don't claim that our religion is superior to all others." The event occurs on Pentecost Sunday (May 11)



## UCC Makes Lemonade from Obama-Wright Connection

by Alan F. H. Wisdom

**T**he connection between Sen. Barack Obama and radical pastor Jeremiah Wright may have embarrassed the candidate; however, it apparently thrilled Wright's denomination. The United Church of Christ (UCC) quickly set about trying to turn the controversy into a public-relations bonanza. While Obama distanced himself from Wright's more incendiary remarks, the UCC was proud to claim him as one of its own.

**While Obama distanced himself from Wright's more incendiary remarks, the UCC was proud to claim him as one of its own.**

Wright came to national attention in March when clips from his sermons were widely aired. Preaching after September 11, 2001, the pastor characterized the terrorist attacks as "America's chickens coming home to roost." In a 2003 sermon, he exclaimed, "No, no, no, not 'God Bless America.' God damn America—that's in the Bible—for killing innocent people." Wright also claimed, "The [U.S.] government lied about inventing the HIV virus as a means of genocide against people of color."

The bluntness of Wright's language may have been unusual; however, his general stance—the charge that the U.S. government is the great force for evil in the world today, and the demand that Christians resist this evil American empire—is quite common on the religious left.

The incendiary quotes were not isolated misstatements taken out of context. On the contrary, they fit within a coherent worldview (on Wright's part, if not Obama's).

The website of Trinity United Church of Christ, the Chicago congregation that Wright pastored for 36 years and to which Obama has belonged for 20, features the slogan "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian." The website describes Trinity as "a church whose theological perspective starts from the vantage point of Black liberation theology." It advertises the congregation's "African-centered thought" and "Black value system." Wright's church is politically committed to "liberation," "restoration," and "economic parity."

Some commentators reasoned that Wright could not really be as hostile to white America as he sounded, since he belonged to the 90-percent white UCC. But they misunderstood today's UCC leadership, which delights in hearing militants denounce America's many sins.

UCC President John Thomas compared the radical Wright to the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah, a "rough and ready prophet calling us to repentance." Thomas contended that the Trinity pastor's "real crime" was "using a mild 'obscenity' in reference to the United States." The UCC president maintained that "the real obscenity" was the U.S. record of war crimes and economic injustice. In a UCC news release, denominational leaders hailed Wright's Afrocentric congregation as "a jewel," "a model," and "everything a Christian community is supposed to be."

**A Church of 'Open Ideas' and 'Extravagant Welcome'?**  
The UCC attempted to convert the Wright brouhaha into

**THE WRIGHT STUFF (ABOVE)** The Rev. Jeremiah Wright has proved to be a thorn in the side for the Obama campaign with his black liberation theology and heated anti-American rhetoric. But that has not stopped the UCC from embracing him. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)



a recruiting tool with a full-page advertisement in the April 2 *New York Times*. The ad—at a cost of \$120,000, according to the UCC website—proclaimed, “[W]e are eager to share the broad and diverse story of the United Church of Christ, which we celebrate.”

The ad did not name Wright or Obama. Instead it boasted, “We are a church of open ideas, extravagant welcome and evangelical courage.” It claimed the heritage of the Mayflower colonists, Declaration of Independence signers, and early abolitionists, asserting, “Our story is this nation’s story.” The ad declared, “Ours is a risk-taking church, because ours is a risk-taking God.” It urged *Times* readers: “Find your church. Find yourself.”

Perhaps some unchurched liberals, seeking spiritual grounding for their predetermined political beliefs, might find this pitch appealing. But if they entered a typical UCC congregation, they might be disappointed to find that the real United Church of Christ does not resemble the denomination described in the

advertisement. It is ethnically homogenous and rapidly aging. Its membership has dropped steadily, from 2.1 million in 1967 to 1.2 million today.

The UCC leadership is not diverse in its theology or its politics. It is almost uniformly liberal. The denominational website presents classic Christian creeds as mere “historic testimonies” of “our ancestors.” A recent adaptation of the UCC Statement of Faith dispenses with the classic Christian language of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” for the Trinity. The UCC is the only sizeable U.S. Christian denomination that has endorsed same-sex marriage.

The Biblical Witness Fellowship, speaking for disaffected members, laments “the growing ethos in the United Church of Christ [that] presses for conformity to a rigid ideology that affirms pansexual behavior as normal and systematically rejects the faith of . . . those who hold evangelical, conservative, orthodox or traditional Christian convictions.” It notes, “A growing emphasis on conformity to ‘progressive’ ideology has alienated many

minority members in the United Church of Christ . . .”

On some occasions, UCC leaders have played up the Obama connection more explicitly. The Democratic presidential candidate was a keynote speaker at the 2007 UCC General Synod—an event that sparked an IRS investigation (still unresolved). Denominational officials have told the press that they hope Obama’s UCC link will attract new members.

Perhaps, for the first time in 40 years, the UCC membership will indeed turn upward in 2008. Perhaps, for the first time in history, we will see politics revive a denomination that has gone soft in its doctrine. Until the numbers come in, however, this UCC recipe for renewal merits a healthy dose of skepticism. ■



**Alan F. H. Wisdom** is the Vice President for Research and Programs at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

## Presidential Candidates and Their Churches

It is always risky to judge a candidate by his or her church affiliation. In choosing where to worship, how much is determined by the candidate’s deepest beliefs? How much by unexamined habit? How much by political calculation? With politicians, as with humans more generally, the motives are almost always mixed.

Our question in evaluating a candidate should be: How well is he or she prepared to carry out the oath to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States”? Obviously, a just and capable person of any religion could fulfill that duty. But a person’s religious background will often shape how he or she understands justice and how he or she will act to uphold justice. When a candidate cites faith as a motivating factor and credits an individual as a spiritual mentor—as has been the case with Sen. Barack Obama and the Rev. Jeremiah Wright—then it is legitimate to inquire into the nature of the faith being conveyed.

Obama’s chief Democratic rival, Sen. Hillary Clinton, has deep roots in United Methodism, going back to her childhood church in Park Ridge, IL. (For a full discussion, see Paul Kengor’s *God and Hillary Clinton* (Harper, 2007).) It was in that congregation that a youth minister, the Rev. Don Jones, won her over to the more liberal “Social Gospel.” Jones gave her a subscription to the radical UM-supported *Motive* magazine, which she read faithfully during her college years.

It appears that Clinton was not a regular churchgoer through a period in the 1970s. But after 1980 she became an active member of First United Methodist of Little Rock, AR. She gave talks around the state about “Why I am a United Methodist,” emphasizing a “gospel of social justice.”

When she came to Washington in 1993, Clinton and her husband became regular attenders at Foundry United Methodist Church. The pastor there, Dr. J. Philip Wogaman, was a seminary ethicist who lauded “Christian socialism” and championed the affirmation of homosexuality. Since her election to the Senate in 2000, Clinton has not had a regular church home.

The presumptive Republican nominee, Sen. John McCain, is more reticent in discussing his faith. His autobiographical *Faith of My Fathers* (Random House, 1999) makes only passing mentions: the piety of his father reciting daily from the Episcopal Prayer Book, the comfort of singing Christmas carols in a North Vietnamese prison, the time he tried to explain Christ’s death and resurrection to one of his interrogators.

For years congressional directories identified McCain as an Episcopalian. But the candidate caused a minor stir last fall when he told a reporter: “By the way, I’m not Episcopalian. I’m Baptist.” He later added, “I have attended North Phoenix Baptist Church for many years, and the most important thing is that I’m a Christian, and I don’t have anything else to say about the issue.”

The North Phoenix church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Its statement of faith makes a straightforward evangelistic appeal: “By confessing your sin to God, putting your trust in Jesus and what His death and resurrection made possible for you, and surrendering your life to God’s purposes, you can begin a personal relationship with Jesus.” ■



## One Dream: A Free China

The 2008 Olympics Offer an Opportunity to Shine a Light on China's Human Rights Record

by Faith J. H. McDonnell

There has been heavy media coverage of Chinese human rights abuses in Tibet and its involvement in the genocide in Darfur.

“One World, One Dream” is the motto of the upcoming Beijing Olympics. This motto “conveys the lofty ideal of the people in Beijing as well as in China to share the global community and civilization and to create a bright future hand in hand with the people from the rest of the world,” says the official website. The website also says that the motto signifies that China is “committed to peaceful development, harmonious society and people’s happiness,” and it “voices the aspirations of 1.3 billion Chinese people to contribute to the establishment of a peaceful and bright world.”

Most of the world would love to see China achieve these “lofty ideals.” But the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government believes that people can be happy under the thumb of the Communist Party, and that a harmonious society is one over which it has complete control. As the Olympic torch circled the globe, so have demonstrations against the Chinese government. Human rights watchdogs and advocates have urged President George W. Bush and other leaders to boycott the August 8, 2008, opening ceremonies or even the entire Olympics. Others, even some of the very Chinese who are victims of PRC abuse, oppose a boycott. They are proud that this honor has come to China. But they also urge the world to use the opportunity to speak out—not

only about China’s bright future, but also the grim realities of the present.

In the runup to the Olympics, there has been heavy media coverage of Chinese human rights abuses, focused mainly on the PRC’s repression in Tibet and its involvement in the genocide in Darfur. But abuses of the communist government are much more widespread, touching other minority ethnic and religious groups, especially Chinese Christians, as well as the refugees who have fled neighboring North Korea.

Fresh unrest in Tibet began on March 10, 2008, the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the failed Tibetan uprising. Since that day, images of riots and the subsequent violent crackdown on protestors have marched across television screens and front pages of the world’s newspapers.

Countless editorials have excoriated China for participating in the Sudanese government’s genocide against the Darfurians of western Sudan. Most articles fail to mention that China’s involvement in Sudan reaches back to the genocidal jihad against South Sudan and other marginalized areas. But the participation of celebrities such as film director Steven Spielberg, who in February 2008 decided to withdraw as an artistic advisor to the Beijing Olympics because of Darfur, ensures ample media coverage on the Darfur front.

Falun Gong practitioners do not have big-name advocates, but they draw media attention by their sheer numbers around the world. They also have their own newspapers and television network to raise awareness of the brutal policies of the Chinese government. There has been a crackdown on Falun Gong since 1999, when the peaceful

**LIGHT OF FREEDOM (ABOVE)** A Chinese pro-democracy demonstrator holds up his “torch of democracy” in protest against PRC abuses. (Andrew Wong/Getty Images)

traditional Chinese spiritual movement was banned by the PRC as an “evil cult.” The U.S. State Department believes that some 100,000 members have been imprisoned or sent to psychiatric hospitals or “reeducation” (labor) camps. The pre-Olympic purge has not spared them either. In recent months 1,500 Falun Gong practitioners have been rounded up and detained. At least one detainee, popular folk singer Yu Zhou, died under mysterious circumstances while in custody.

The brutal Kim Jong-Il regime of North Korea hosted the Olympic torch relay on April 28, 2008, but China is not a good host to North Korean refugees. Kim’s starvation and persecution of his own people have forced over 300,000 North Koreans to flee to China, but they live in terror of being discovered by the Chinese authorities. China refuses to acknowledge North Koreans as refugees or asylum seekers. Instead, it identifies them as economic migrants and sends them back to North Korea. Repatriates are imprisoned, are tortured, and may be executed. In addition, up to 70 percent of North Korean women in China are forced into prostitution. Recently the North Korea Freedom Coalition, Korean American pastors and university students, North Korean refugees and defectors, Japanese with family abducted by the North Korean government, and Korean War veterans have mounted a campaign using the Beijing Olympics to pressure China to stop forcibly repatriating North Koreans. But without someone like Spielberg as an advocate, the tragic and remarkable stories of North Korean refugees may not receive adequate media coverage.

Forced abortion and sterilization of Chinese women, and the persecution and imprisonment of activists who speak against these practices, are other areas that have lacked media coverage. In 2005, Chen Guangcheng, a courageous legal advocate, exposed these outlawed practices. The blind activist went from village to village collecting the testimonies of thousands of women in his home province of Shandong. They had been rounded up and forced to be sterilized or have abortions, even in the eighth month of pregnancy. Chen presented his findings in a class-action lawsuit against the

Linyi City bureau of the Family Planning Commission, and to major international media. A year later, as Chen was named one of *Time* magazine’s 100 most influential people of 2006, the media covered his arrest and sentencing to four years of imprisonment. But sadly, all the recent coverage of China’s human rights abuses has lacked much follow-up on Chen Guangcheng and on the emergence once again in the months preceding the Olympics of draconian family planning action in eastern China.

Probably the most important coverage of Chen Guangcheng during the pre-Olympic protests has been to have his photo on the shirt of another young dissident, Buddhist blogger Hu Jia. On April 3, 2008, Hu was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison for “inciting subversion of the state.” Most mainstream media coverage focused on Hu’s activism in the trendier human rights issues such as AIDS, the environment, and Tibetan autonomy. But Hu is also a great admirer of Chen Guangcheng, and chronicled on the internet Chen’s harassment and arrest by the Chinese government. Even when Western protestors only see China’s injustice towards particular groups, Chinese activists themselves realize that China must be confronted on behalf of all who are being repressed and persecuted.

China must be confronted on its human rights violations against Christians. More Christians are in prison for their faith in China than anywhere else in the world. And as part of the preparation for the Olympics, there has been a new government crackdown. For example, on April 13, 2008, China Aid reported that 46 Christians were arrested in Xinjiang Autonomous Region for holding illegal Bible classes and worship services. On March 19, 2008, Beijing bookstore owner Shi Weihai was re-arrested for publishing Bibles and Christian literature after having been released due to lack of evidence in January, China Aid says. In February 2008 it also reported that 70 house church leaders were rounded up during a Bible class in Henan Province.

Most worrisome is the plight of Alimujiang Yimiti, a Uyghur Christian and father of two in Xinjiang. Alimujiang, a convert from Islam, was taken into custody in January 2008. He was charged with

“subversion of the national government and endangering national security,” a crime punishable by death. But Alimujiang’s friends reported to China Aid that he is neither a “separatist nor a terrorist.” Even though Uyghurs have been marginalized within their own land as the Han (traditional) Chinese presence increases, as a Christian, Alimujiang loves and supports the Chinese government. He, like most Chinese Christians, is a good, loyal citizen and the government should recognize him as such.

Human rights advocates and particularly fellow Christians should use this prime time leading up to the Olympics to speak out for persecuted Christians in China such as Alimujiang. In recent years traditional house churches have been joined by pro-democracy intellectuals—artists, lawyers, poets, and heroes of Tiananmen Square—who have discovered true freedom in Jesus Christ. What the Chinese authorities refer to as “Jesus fever” is raging across China, bringing an average of several million new converts into the church annually. By the most cautious estimates, there are now over 70 million Protestant and Catholic Christians in mainland China.

Even as Jesus fever goes unremarked by most of the world’s media and elites, the burgeoning fusion of Christianity and democracy is encouraging all dissidents, Christian and secular, who dream of a free China. The significance of Christianity as a potential force for the democratization of China is lost on most of the media and outside secular human rights activists. But it is not lost on the Chinese communist regime that is trying to control the epidemic. If the Chinese government really wishes to attain the lofty ideals described in the Beijing Olympics motto, it need only embrace the true religious freedom and human rights for all that would bring a “bright future” to China. ☛



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



# Religious Activists Accuse United States of Pro-Torture Policy

by Rebekah M. Sharpe

**A**nti-war activists gathered the first weekend of March for the “Christian Peace Witness for Iraq” events in Washington, DC. Events for the weekend included a Friday morning “Interfaith Mini-Conference on U.S.-Sponsored Torture.” There, vocal former CIA employee and 9-11 conspiracy theorist Ray McGovern called the Iraq struggle a “war of aggression” by the United States and the “context” in which “torture is just one of the accumulating evils of the whole.”

“Can you handle the truth, folks?” McGovern asked. “I think we need to handle the truth.” He asserted: “The purpose of this war is very simple now. The President of the United States has stated in a signing statement on the Defense Authorization Bill, saying, in so many words, that the establishment of permanent military bases and access to Iraqi oil” was the purpose of the Iraq War. “It can’t be disguised,” McGovern adamantly asserted.

McGovern suggested that torture by the U.S. government was used to elicit false information on which the administration founded its reasons for going to war in the Middle East. He contended, “If it gets bad information, why do we torture? ... Sometimes you want bad information. Sometimes you want to prove ties between Iraq and al Qaeda.”

Accusing the United States of “disregarding the Geneva Convention,” McGovern claimed that former CIA Director George Tenet and others have been “shielded from accountability” because of a “timid Congress and an arrogant White House.” He further argued that current laws allow President Bush to “use the CIA as his personal

Gestapo,” and that presidential memoranda contain “loophole[s] through which Donald Rumsfeld drove the Mack truck of torture.”

Ironically, McGovern’s talk on “The Reality of U.S.-Sponsored Torture” did not cite any specific instances of torture by the United States military. Instead, he cited a counter-terrorism official’s statement before Congress that “after 9-11 the gloves came off.”

McGovern recalled Martin Luther King’s saying, “There is such a thing as being too late,” and insisted that in terms of stopping alleged U.S. torture, “we’re almost there, folks.” No attempt was

McGovern suggested that torture by the U.S. government was used to elicit false information on which the administration founded its reasons for going to war in the Middle East.

made by the speaker to define torture, or to identify what would constitute such a point of no return.

Arguing for the need for more radical action, McGovern declared, “The time for speaking and the time for writing is passed.... In the tradition of the Hebrew prophets [we] have a duty to make the broken victims go free.” It was not clear whether he was advocating the immediate release of all terrorism suspects who might claim to have been tortured. McGovern also noted that in his theological studies he learned, “Jesus, Yahweh, the Prophet, all really only cared about one thing: that we do justice.” He told his audience that they needed to fight “the theology of Empire.”

Presbyterian minister Carol Wickersham of No2Torture, Rabbi Sid Schwarz of PANIM: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, and Mohamed Elsanousi of the Islamic Society of North

America spoke as panelists at the conference. All gave unimpeachable arguments for why Christians, Jews, and Muslims should oppose torture and respect human dignity. But they injected the assumption that the United States was a deliberate practitioner of routine torture. Like McGovern, none cited specific victims or occasions of torture by the United States.

Wickersham said that conference participants should “tell the truth, because there are obviously being told a lot of [unspecified] lies. We need to be calling on our elected officials ... we ... no longer have all the Republicans in charge.

We should be able to have a different kind of accountability. It doesn’t seem that we do [have a new atmosphere of accountability].” She stated that “Jesus was tortured to death because he was perceived to be a national security threat” and that this same line of thinking justified the torture of people in modern society.

The Rev. Louise Green, the Minister of Social Justice at a Washington Unitarian Universalist Church, led opening and closing worship. She called on participants to join her in singing a refrain, stating, “As we bless the Source of Life, so we are blessed... The blessing gives us ... strength ... hope ... life ... and the courage to dare.” Our ability to act, said Green, “doesn’t come from our own will power ... [it] comes as a blessing that we receive ...” from an unnamed entity. ■



**Rebekah M. Sharpe**

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

# The Papal Visit

by James W. Tonkowich

In April it was my privilege to serve as an ecumenical representative when President George Bush welcomed Pope Benedict XVI to the White House. Seated on the South Lawn behind three rows of cardinals, I joined thousands of well-wishers at what was a joyous reception.

Standing in line waiting to enter the White House grounds, I spoke with a gentleman who was Jewish and very excited about seeing the pope. “I love Benedict!” he exclaimed.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because the pope is the one person among all the religions who can speak up for and defend Western civilization and Western values.”

*Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson expanded on that idea in his April 18 op-ed, “The Indispensable Church”:

... despite charges of dogmatism, the church is the main defender of reason in the modern world. It teaches the possibility that moral truth can be known through reflection and argument. It criticizes what Pope Benedict XVI has called the “dictatorship of relativism”—a belief “that does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires.”

This is a broadside at much of American Christianity—Protestant and Catholic. It cuts across the sexual and lifestyle proclivities of the Protestant mainline, evangelical market-driven church growth, the vagueness of “cafeteria Catholics” picking and choosing what to believe, and any other willingness to edit “the faith once delivered” in the pursuit of institutional or personal goals.

The “dictatorship of relativism” was Benedict’s theme at the United Nations,



**NATURAL LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS** Pope Benedict XVI speaks to the crowd on the White House South Lawn. Benedict has spoken extensively about the dangers when relativism to erode the foundations of human rights and human dignity. (Olivier Douliery/ABACAUSA)

where it has devastating consequences for human rights.

The pope told the UN that human rights “are based on the natural law inscribed on human hearts and present in different cultures and civilizations.” In this, he echoed our own founding principle: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...”

“Removing human rights from this context,” the pope stressed, “would mean restricting their range and yielding to a relativistic conception, according to which the meaning and interpretation of rights could vary and their universality would be denied in the name of different cultural, political, social and even religious outlooks.”

If rights depend on the goodwill of government, community, church, or culture, then they are not rights at all but boons granted or withheld. True human rights originate not with those in

authority over us, but with Him who is in authority over all.

Relativism is moreover the great enemy of freedom. IRD board member Michael Novak notes that truth “is a necessary condition for a free society. For if there is no such regulative ideal, then human relations do not fall under the authority of truth and evidence but answer only to authoritarian will and power.”

The battle for the heart of the Church in America is equally a battle for the heart of America, a struggle between truth and the “dictatorship of relativism.” In this, Pope Benedict and the church he represents are welcome friends and vital allies. 📖



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

# Climate Change Roils Southern Baptists

by Alan F. H. Wisdom

**A** Southern Baptist Declaration on the Environment and Climate Change” swept onto the scene on March 10, setting off a minor tempest within America’s largest Protestant denomination. “Southern Baptists Back a Shift on Climate Change,” trumpeted that day’s *New York Times*. Extensive media coverage suggested that the conservative Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was ready to sign up for member Al Gore’s anti-global warming crusade.

But it soon came out that the reality was more complicated. Southern Baptists were not of one mind on the issue, and the convention’s official position had not changed.

The declaration argued, “It is prudent to address global climate change.” The signers admitted modestly that “we do not have any special revelation to guide us” regarding global warming, that “we do not have special training as scientists,” and that “Christians are not united around either the scientific explanations for global warming or policies designed to slow it down.”

Nevertheless the declaration attributed to scientists a “general agreement” about the causes and severity of global warming. Therefore, it insisted, “Humans must be proactive and take responsibility for our contributions to climate change—however great or small.” The signers pledged vaguely to “give serious consideration to responsible policies that acceptably address the conditions set forth in this declaration.”

The most explosive line in the declaration was the claim, “We believe our current denominational engagement with these issues have [sic] often been too timid, failing to produce a unified moral voice.” No specifics were offered as to how

Southern Baptist policies had fallen short of Gospel boldness.

The statement appeared to be a criticism of the resolution “On Global Warming” adopted by the 2007 Southern Baptist Convention. That resolution “urge[d] Southern Baptists to proceed cautiously in the human-induced global warming debate in light of conflicting scientific research.” It “support[ed] cost-effective measures to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gas emissions” but “reject[ed] government-mandated reduc-

Media got the impression that the convention’s top leadership had converted, *en masse* and in less than nine months, to the anti-global warming cause. But it turned out that the declaration had no official standing.

tions in greenhouse emissions.” Tight caps on carbon emissions, the 2007 convention warned, “could lead to major economic hardships on a worldwide scale.”

What made the declaration so striking was that it was endorsed by the Rev. Frank Page, the current SBC president. Other signers included two past SBC presidents: the Rev. Jack Graham and the Rev. James Merritt. These names, and the document’s title, gave it an official appearance. Media got the impression that the convention’s top leadership had converted, *en masse* and in less than nine months, to the anti-global warming cause.

But it turned out that the declaration had no official standing. It was the product of a 25-year-old seminary student, Jonathan Merritt, son of James Merritt. Dr. Richard Land, president of the denomination’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), hastened to issue a March 10 press release noting that neither he nor his commission had endorsed the declaration.

Land stressed that the 2007 resolution remained “as close to an ‘official’ position

as the SBC is capable of making.” He maintained that “it would be misleading and unethical of the ERLC to promote a position at variance with the Convention’s expressly stated positions.” Land observed, “If the ERLC asserted Southern Baptists were in a different place on an issue than they actually were, we would lose the trust of Southern Baptists, and we would rapidly lose our credibility in Washington as well.” (Lobbyists for all church bodies ought to consider these dangers when they are tempted to free-lance advocacy for

personal political opinions.)

Frank Page also issued a March 10 press release. The SBC president backed away from the “too timid” allegation:

“Let me state clearly that I do not believe this is true of the Southern Baptist Convention in an official capacity. In fact, Southern Baptists have long stood for a clear environmental message which takes seriously God’s call to guard and keep the earth.... As Southern Baptist Convention President, I totally stand behind the resolutions that have been passed in recent years.”

Page reinterpreted the declaration as “simply a call to responsible biblical stewardship of our environment.” It only “mention[ed] the fact that some of God’s people have been too timid in years past about speaking to this issue,” according to Page. It would not be surprising to see the global warming issue pop up again in the convention. ☐



**Alan F. H. Wisdom** is the Vice President for Research and Programs at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.



# Baby, It's Cold Outside (And It May Be Getting Colder)

by James W. Tonkowich

As global warming alarmists focus their angst on the freak seventy degree day we had here in Washington in January as proof positive of human-caused global warming, several studies have been published that ought to (but probably will not) cool their heated rhetoric.

On February 26, blogger Michael Asher reported on DailyTech.com that the most recent tracking of temperature data by the four major global temperature tracking groups indicates that “over the past year global temperatures have dropped precipitously.” The total amount of cooling ranges between 0.65° C and 0.75° C. This is “a value large enough to wipe out most of the warming recorded in the past 100 years.”

Is global cooling a certainty? No. Truth be told, we simply don't know what the climate will be like a hundred years from now. It is a matter we have no choice but to leave in the hands of the Almighty.

This new information, however, does not mean that Christians have no environmental task. As Dr. E. Calvin Beisner writes in the IRD Mount Nebo Paper, *Setting Priorities for Creation Care: What Is the Most Important Environmental Task Facing American Christians Today?*:

The dominion mandate to Adam and Eve at the creation makes human responsibility for creation stewardship inescapable. Neither our fall into sin nor the redeeming work of Christ eliminates that responsibility.

Rather, the fall complicates it, as the Earth too suffers the consequences of human sin.

Beisner then goes on to say that for Christians “redemption elevates environmental stewardship, making it part of the hope-filled task of the redeemed in spreading the kingdom of Christ.”

What can we do? Rather than trying

disease and death, as well as the waste of resources, deforestation, and loss of habitat for other species. The implication is clear: Economic development is the most important environmental task facing American Christians today.

The poor are always the people who are most vulnerable to the climate. Heat

or cold, drought or flood, blizzard or hurricane, the poor suffer the most. And they suffer for two reasons: first, the poor often lack sufficient shelter from the elements; second, because the climate changes economic realities and the poor are the most vulnerable to the economic climate.

People, as Becky Norton-Dunlop of the Heritage Foundation says, are our most important natural resource. And whether the next hundred years is marked by warming or cooling, the poor will need our help to rise out of poverty and the accompanying environmental degradation.

I hope you'll download and study the Mount Nebo Paper, *Setting Priorities for Creation Care*. Come rain or come shine, come heat or come cold, there's a world of good we can—and must—do together. ☞



vainly to mitigate climate change, we can prepare for climate change. Beisner concludes:

To put it briefly and simply: the greatest threat to the environment is poverty. It is also the greatest threat to human material well-being. Poverty drives high per-capita and per-unit-of-production pollution-emission rates and low pollution-cleanup rates. These contribute to high rates of human



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

## Presbyterians May Halt Missionary Erosion

by James D. Berkley

**T**he Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly this June could just possibly begin to reverse nearly a half century of missionary decline—just barely, if all goes well. It's about time!

"Make disciples," Jesus told his followers in the classic Great Commission passage in Matthew 28:19–20, just before his ascension. Attached to that "make disciples" was a rather emphatic "go!" Jesus was saying, "Get outta here and make some disciples." And thus began world mission. Persecution in Jerusalem and elsewhere only added to it.

For a few centuries, that "Go!" command pretty well occupied the life of the early church, and disciples were made in the far reaches of several continents. Eventually, however, complacency and institution-minding set in, and around the time of the Reformation, heading

off to some far place to be a missionary became rather uncommon. But then along came the modern mission movement in the early 1800s, and for about 200 years, Protestant Christians began heading off to frontiers with the life-giving message of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

A trickle became a massive flow, and by 1959, for example, the predecessor denominations to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) were sending nearly 1,900 missionaries to foreign lands. But eventually the flow peaked

and then ebbed. By 1965, the number of missionaries had eroded to just under 1,700. The numbers from then on kept plummeting. By 1985, the total was only 592, a 65 percent decrease in two decades.

That kind of decline sadly continued year after year. Missionaries retired and weren't replaced. Others were brought home prematurely. Projects ceased. Interest waned. Nondenominational missions flourished. Presbyterian mission blunders, such as embracing liberation theology or Marxist movements, eroded donor confidence. Thus, by 2006, Presbyterians had only 252 missionaries deployed, which evidenced another 57 percent decrease in two decades, and a whopping 85 percent decrease from four decades earlier. By the end of General Assembly this June, the number of PCUSA missionaries will stand at an estimated 196, and perhaps even fewer by the end of the year. That's about one tenth of the number Presbyterians supported in 1959. Sadly, we see similar trends in many other historic U.S. denominations: a surge of missionaries in the 19th and early 20th centuries and then a long, sad decline over the past generation.

### Planning for a Slight Turn-Around

The half-century decline, year after year, may end with 2008. The budget for 2009 that General Assembly Council is preparing to recommend to General Assembly in June calls for a slight increase in mission funding and in the number of actual missionaries deployed. If this budget pencils out and all other factors hold, the 196 missionaries in June 2008 could swell to 215 in 2009 and maybe 220 in 2010.

**By the end of General Assembly this June, the number of PCUSA missionaries will stand at an estimated 196.**



That sweet increase represents a beginning, yet it's an almost imperceptible bulge, given that just two years ago, Presbyterians were dropping down to a much higher figure of 252 missionaries amid much wailing and gnashing of teeth. General Assembly Council received a report in April that chose to give a happy spin to this mainly symbolic turn-around, trumpeting it with the statement that "World Mission launches a new structure aimed at strengthening historic commitments and facilitating direct mission involvement by increasing the number of mission personnel for the first time since the 1950s."

While any increase beats the alternative and can be a start, four further factors need to be recognized.

First, a head count of 215 missionaries, if all goes well, remains a minor figure. If one goes back only as far as General Assembly in 2001, great dismay over dropping from 330 missionaries to "only 300" the next year served as the impetus for a major fund-raising campaign, named "Joining Hearts and Hands." Now, just seven years later, we would not be heartsick but elated to have as many as 300 missionaries, which would be more than 50 percent above the 196 we now have.

As the 2001-approved mission-funding campaign has been limping to an embarrassing ending this year, the bottom has fallen out of missionary numbers. Should that pace of decline continue, PCUSA World Mission eventually could book a phone booth for its all-hands meeting. It now takes nearly 9,000 Presbyterians to field one missionary, when in 1965, it took about 2,500, according to Jack Marcum of PCUSA Research Services. In 1965, Presbyterians had more missionaries in the single country of Brazil (239) than we now have spread across the entire world.

Second, rather than serving to restore a horde of missionaries through increased

giving for missions, the Joining Hearts and Hands mission initiative has largely failed. Up through the end of 2007, six and a half years into an intended six-year campaign to raise \$20 million for missions support, the campaign had cost about \$4.1 million to operate but had released only about \$1.2 million in new money to fund missionaries. It appears to have funded fund-raising consultants at a far greater rate than missionaries! Joining Hearts and Hands has not succeeded in joining wallets and missionaries. The average Presbyterian would have needed to give eight cents per year to missions to come up with the new money dispersed

**Up through the end of 2007, six and a half years into an intended six-year campaign to raise \$20 million for missions support, the campaign had cost about \$4.1 million to operate but had released only about \$1.2 million in new money.**

over that period.

Third, even the small increase in budget and missionary numbers for 2009 and 2010 may not be possible, or if possible, the increase may not be sustainable. Further missteps by a denominational hierarchy with a poor track record could further erode givers' confidence in its ability to prudently use missions giving. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for some time has not been the only missions show in town, and churches and individuals have been funneling increasing amounts to other relief and mission-sending agencies. People doing missions are also venturing out now on their own, skipping the denominational "middle man."

The mildly ambitious 2009–2010 budgets assume givers will not lose patience or their tempers over denominational affairs. A controversial or tempestuous General Assembly or its aftermath could redound in donors no longer willing to trust the denomination with their giving. Decreased giving would automatically result in smaller missionary numbers.

In addition, the budgets for 2009 and

2010 utilize one-time sources of income or cost savings that will not be available in following years. The denominational curriculum needs to do well as a business in order to free up \$100k for missions, for instance. A couple of other controversial offices need to be successful in fund-raising. The Medical Benevolence Foundation is adding seven new medical missionaries to the World Mission head count, so World Mission is looking to outside sources to be propped up. The dollar is falling abroad, increasing the costs to field missionaries in overseas economies. All this adds up to difficulty in sustaining any turnaround.

Finally, in order to go out and round up significantly greater income for denominational causes such as more missionaries, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be padding significantly greater expenses into its fund-raising budget lines. An increase of roughly a million dollars is nearly doubling the "Funds Development"

expense to \$2.2 million. "Mission Interpretation" is going up another \$0.4 million to more than \$4 million. The PCUSA is spending big money to try to raise more money.

One wants the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to succeed in turning itself around, in sending more missionaries into a broken world, in making disciples of all nations. This could be the start of something good. And one hopes that should the denomination actually accomplish its goals in money and missionary head counts, it will also succeed in "contend[ing] for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." That would be the greatest achievement. ■



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



# Presbyterian Action Challenges Entrenched Special Interests

by James D. Berkley

**A**t the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly in late June in San Jose, plucky Davids will be taking on well-placed Goliaths in efforts to produce more fairness in one case and to retain it in another. Presbyterian Action will be standing with commissioners and overtur advocates seeking to remove involuntary support of the World and National Councils of Churches from per capita congregational assessments. Similarly, Presbyterian Action is actively supporting efforts to retain an equitable position in relation to Palestine and Israel.

In both cases, however, powerful and well-placed entities within the denomination are aligned against these reasonable efforts. Entrenched special interests do not give up their exclusive advantages without a murmur.

## Ending 'Taxed' Support for Ecumenical Politics

The Presbyterian budgeting process includes two pots: the per capita budget for shared ecclesiastical expenses, and the mission budget for ministries. The Book of Order actually has little to say about the per capita budget, other than that it is intended to fund "operating expenses, including administrative personnel" and pay the meeting expenses of commissioners.

Out of that minor authorization, a \$14 million enterprise has mushroomed, including the payment of approximately a million dollars a year to fund Presbyterian participation in controversial ecumenical groups such as the National Council of Churches (NCC). Several presbyteries have submitted resolutions that the General Assembly transfer ecumenical support from the per capita budget to the mission budget, which is raised not by compulsion but by voluntary giving.

This solution would be a much more appropriate funding system, but it would

not sit well with powerful forces that prefer to fund favorite enterprises with everyone's money, whether or not everyone wants to give. The NCC may have begun as a movement for Christian unity and mission, but it has morphed into a political action group positioning itself as a voice countering conservative Christianity. Thus, against their will, traditional congregations find themselves supporting the very powers that oppose their faith and practice.

Any move to readjust support, however, receives stiff opposition. Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick doesn't hesitate to bare his strong ecclesiastical arm to defend ecumenical funding. Often he gets joined by flown-in top guns, such as Bob Edgar, former NCC general secretary, to overwhelm the everyman overtur advocate working for churches' rights.

The power play against the voice from the grassroots is often brutal, and it will probably be so again in San Jose. This is not a reform Kirkpatrick will want to allow on his final watch. Presbyterian Action is happy to be joining forces with the presbyteries working to reasonably untie controversial ecumenical support from enforced giving. We stand with the little guy against unjust bureaucratic clout.

## Maintaining Middle East Even-Handedness

In 2006, General Assembly produced a remarkably statesmanlike resolution that replaced a 2004 resolution's partisan harshness with evenhanded goodwill toward both Palestinian and Israeli alike. However, while commissioners had ostensibly positioned Presbyterians as benevolent peacemakers, persons and networks well-placed in positions of denominational influence continued unabated in militant promotion of pointedly anti-Israel rhetoric and actions.

Presbyterian entities such as the Israel-Palestine Mission Network simply will not allow a pro-Israel voice in their midst, leaning inevitably toward a blame-Israel stance. Presbyterian Middle East missionaries cannot be counted on for unbiased reporting. One is assigned to a resolutely anti-Israel liberation theology organization. Large parts of a complete narrative of the situation turn up missing, such as horrific terrorism being the practical reason for the Israeli security barrier and checkpoints. All the while, Presbyterian social-witness and ethical-investment committee members speak with unchecked contempt for Israel.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that the demonize-Israel bloc is bringing to General Assembly a number of resolutions singling out Israel for harsh censure, while largely underplaying Palestinian violence and responsibility. The overtures arrive with reasonable-sounding titles, such as "On Pursuing a Culture of a Just Peace." Dig into the overtures, however, and one soon finds condemnation pointed only toward Israel, without balance or explanation.

However, a resolution from National Capital Presbytery in Washington, DC, warmly throws aside the choosing of sides and calls on "all who, clinging to narrow self-interests, stand in the way of such a solution to consider the interest of all God's children in the region." This is the kind of message Presbyterian Action will be laboring to propound, in necessary opposition to the shrill voices of partisan bigotry coming from within the Presbyterian apparatus. ■



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

# Judge Recognizes Split Among Anglicans

by Erik R. Nelson

**O**n April 3, Judge Randy Bellows of the Fairfax County Circuit Court ruled in favor of the Virginia churches that have departed the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. Bellows called evidence of division in the church “not only compelling, but overwhelming,” and ruled that the Virginia Statute on Religious Division, Va. Code 57-9(A), is applicable to this case.

The “division statute,” as it is known, was enacted in 1867 in response to churches splitting during the Civil War. The statute allows the majority in a splitting church to retain the property.

Large majorities of the members in each of the 11 Anglican churches at issue voted to sever their ties to the Episcopal Church and the diocese following disputes over the redefinition and reinterpretation of Scripture. Negotiations between the diocese and the departing parishes broke down in January 2007, and the diocese initiated the lawsuit.

The Episcopal Church and the diocese were expected to challenge the court’s decision. Bellows scheduled arguments on the constitutionality of the Virginia statute for May 28.

“The court finds that a division has occurred in the diocese,” said Bellows in his 83-page decision. “Over 7 percent of the churches in the diocese, 11 percent of its baptized membership and 18 percent of the diocesan average attendance of 32,000 [per Sunday] have left in the past two years.”

Bellows noted the widespread involvement of churches across the country in the dispute, the creation of new entities such as the Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA) in which many Episcopalians were now joining, and the spread of the controversy to the

global Anglican Communion as signs that the split was serious. In some cases, Bellows argued, “the creation of a level of distress among many church members [was] so profound and wrenching as to lead them to cast votes in an attempt to disaffiliate from a church which has been their home and heritage throughout their lives, and often back for generations.”

Bellows notes in conclusion that “it blinks at reality to characterize the ongoing division within the Diocese, ECUSA, and the Anglican Communion as anything but a division of the first

**Judge Bellows concluded that “it blinks at reality to characterize the ongoing division within the Diocese, ECUSA, and the Anglican Communion as anything but a division of the first magnitude.”**

magnitude.”

Ralph Webb, director of the Anglican Action program at the Institute on Religion and Democracy commented that “[t]he ruling should cause the Episcopal Church to take a long look at its harsh, take-no-prisoners approach to dealing with church property. This result was by no means inevitable. The denomination should have allowed the diocese to sit down at the table with the CANA congregations.”

Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts-Schori expressed disappointment with the decision. “While we believe that the Court’s conclusion that Virginia’s unusual ‘division’ statute applies to the current situation in the Diocese, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion is incorrect, there will be time enough in the future to seek review of that decision if it becomes necessary.”

The Diocese of Virginia alleged in a statement that the ruling may be a violation of the First Amendment. “At issue is

the government’s ability to intrude into the freedom of the Episcopal Church and other churches to organize and govern themselves according to their faith and doctrine.”

The hearing on May 28 would investigate three principal questions about the Virginia statute: whether it violates the free exercise clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, the establishment clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, or the religious freedom provisions of the Virginia Constitution.

The office of the presiding bishop has indicated its lawyers would present their “contention that if the statute means what the Court has

held, it plainly deprives the Episcopal Church and the Diocese, as well as all hierarchical churches, of their historic constitutional rights to structure their polity free from governmental interference and thus violates the First Amendment and cannot be enforced.”

Webb observed that “the Episcopal Church appears more interested in property than people, and more interested in the recovery of property than in reconciliation. Christians certainly can legitimately differ in their conclusions about who lawfully should possess the property. But sometimes you can be overly zealous concerning some goal that you’ll either never reach or will attain at too great a cost.”



**Erik R. Nelson** is concluding his service as Managing Editor of *Faith & Freedom*. He and Anglican Action Director Ralph A. Webb, also departing the IRD staff, have rendered years of valuable service.

## Lake Junaluska Conference Promotes Pacifism

by John S. A. Lomperis

From January 31 to February 2, over 400 peace activists within the United Methodist church met in North Carolina to lament the violence inherent in the world and to seek alternatives to war and conflict. The speakers extolled the virtues of pacifism, while largely ignoring the church's official teachings on just war principles.

The participants gathered at United Methodism's Lake Junaluska retreat center for the first annual Lake Junaluska Peace Conference. The event was sponsored by the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church & Society (GBCS), the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church, the Southeastern Jurisdiction College of Bishops, the denomination's southeastern

seminaries (Duke, Candler, and Gammon), Asbury Theological Seminary, the World Methodist Council, a couple of local activist groups, and the Lake Junaluska Conference Center.

The plenary speakers generally avoided acknowledging the just war teaching incorporated into the denomination's *Social Principles*. The official United Methodist position speaks negatively of war, calling it "incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ." However, it also recognizes the justifiability of warfare for "prevention of such evils as genocide, brutal suppression of human rights, and unprovoked international aggression." It also affirms the church's "support" for "those persons who

conscientiously choose to serve in the armed forces."

The conference, however, treated military action as unacceptable.

In the opening night's plenary address, South African Methodist bishop Peter Storey urged his audience to heed revisionist Jesus Seminar guru Walter Wink's call to reject "the myth of redemptive violence." Storey rhetorically asked why "we persist in the belief that violence can make the world a better place." He shared several impressive stories of ethnic violence being overcome in South Africa.

The South African bishop's dream for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that Methodism as a worldwide movement "will join the Quakers and the Mennonites" in rejecting "Christendom's centuries-old compromise with violence." While the just war tradition came from "dead, white patriarchs," the bishop credited it for being designed to limit war. Yet he judged that "there has never been a just war." He celebrated the 1948 decision by Costa Rica to abolish its army, although it is still "not a perfectly peace-able kingdom," as Costa Ricans "still have armed police."

Another speaker, Candler School of Theology dean and former United Methodist Women chief executive Jan Love, said in an interview that while she "yearn[s] to be a pacifist," she was not. Having "wrestled with it a lot," she said that she knew that there are some hypothetical circumstances in which she would commit violence. In later remarks at the conference, she called for "a sabbatical from the just war debate," which is "so stale and hackneyed and escapist." Instead, she promoted individuals "largely from historic peace churches"

The speakers extolled the virtues of pacifism, while largely ignoring the church's official teachings on just war principles.



who say that in theory they might not always be pacifists, but who direct the conversation to “realistic ways to avoid war.”

### Emphasis on Iraq

Predictably, much of the conference focused on denouncing U.S. military efforts in Iraq.

Retired bishop Ken Carder, now a professor at Duke Divinity School, lamented that little attention had been paid to the recent resolution of the Council of Bishops calling for “immediate” withdrawal of all U.S. and coalition forces from Iraq, which “illustrates that bishops are not paid much attention to anyhow.”

“The war must end; that is why we are here this weekend,” said GBCS general secretary Jim Winkler. Calling the conflict “an unmitigated disaster,” he declared that “conditions are so bad in Iraq due to our invasion that life was better under Saddam Hussein—and that was an era of fear and misery.” To “accomplish such a terrible feat,” he said, U.S. leaders had to “lie and cheat and steal.”

The denomination’s most visible spokesman demanded that the U.S. “leave Iraq so that Iraq can begin the process of healing.” However, Winkler characteristically avoided any indication of how the resultant security vacuum would help the factional violence in that divided nation. He insisted that the United States “cannot bring peace to Iraq” and “cannot bring democracy to Iraq,” but at least “can stop bombing and killing the people of Iraq.” Conference participants responded with hearty applause to this placing blame for the bombings of Iraqi civilians solely on U.S. forces rather than on the terrorists who actually plant and detonate the bombs.

“Gold Star Mother” Celeste Zappala spoke of her heartbreak after her son was killed in Baghdad, and her subsequent protest, “begg[ing] to be heard” outside the Pentagon and White House. Declaring that “this war is a betrayal of our military and the democracy” it is called to defend, she went on to more broadly condemn “sending the children of other people to kill people we don’t know.” She

also lamented that the anti-war movement was not “led by religious people,” since “sometimes the message becomes as hateful and muddled” as that of “those we oppose.” The bereaved mother also insisted that the one point of consensus for United Methodism should be that “every Iraq veteran who comes home should be welcomed, honored, and cared for!”

Zappala’s son, Dante, made similar points. He portrayed his family’s United Methodist church, home to recently defrocked lesbian minister Beth Stroud, as one “committed to social justice.” The church also portrayed Christ as an “activist” and “revolutionary,” providing an incongruous background for choosing military service, although Dante respected his brother’s motives.

### Peace within the United Methodist Church?

Bishop Storey asserted that within the United Methodist Church itself “there’s a mighty civil war going on” that is diverting attention “from people who are dying around the world.”

Jan Love acknowledged that the United Methodist Church has a great deal of racial, geographic, theological, and political diversity, along with much polarizing tension. She said that the church needed to be “healing our divisions” by “celebrating our diversity” while affirming common ground and mutual love.

Love asked how one could advocate for “peace and justice ... without running roughshod over those who deeply and sincerely disagree and stand in our way.” She urged seeing “Christ anew in the one who offends us the most” and to “really listen to each other in love.” She recalled her challenging experience with such principles during the 1990s in World Council of Churches dialogues with Eastern Orthodox leaders dealing with such touchy issues as “the use of inclusive language” and the role of women in the church. Love pointed out that in “the mainstream of world Christianity ... mainline Western Protestants are a distinct minority” in accepting women’s ordination.

Love was asked how she would respond to IRD/UMAction’s calling on

the GBCS to focus on “common ground” causes, given the denomination’s diversity. She replied that the denomination’s “expansive” common ground was affirmed at each General Conference—in apparent reference to the *Social Principles* and the rarely read but extremely left-leaning *Book of Resolutions*. She said that she did “not accept that that’s not mainstream.” When asked about general agencies’ work contradicting General Conference-endorsed positions, she agreed that “no general agency should be doing that,” but quickly added that she was not aware of any doing so.

Delivering greetings on behalf of his fellow southeastern bishops, James Swanson of the Holston Conference (Eastern Tennessee) strongly defended “that board that so many people either love or hate.” He complained that the GBCS staff has been “demonized and made to suffer because they stood for what is right.” Bishop Swanson insisted that the GBCS simply did what the General Conference, rather than the GBCS staff or board, asked it to do.

At one point, Winkler lashed out at fellow United Methodists who question the activities and priorities of the GBCS, as well as Episcopalians and mainline Presbyterians with similar concerns about their denominational lobby offices. He asserted that such criticism was really “all about” nothing more than the denominational lobbies’ “direct opposition to corporate and military interests.” There is “no other way to see it,” and any other arguments used for reform are a dishonest “smokescreen,” Winkler insisted.

The 2009 Lake Junaluska peace conference will include Jewish and Muslim speakers. But for all the interfaith inclusiveness, it seems highly unlikely that the GBCS and other leaders will seek to make the next Junaluska Peace Conference any less exclusive of more moderate and conservative members of their own denomination. ■



**John S. A. Lomperis** is completing four years of service as Research Associate for the UMAction program of the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

# Do United Methodist Bishops Really Value Christian Unity?

by John S. A. Lomperis

**I**s the Ecumenical Officer for the United Methodist Council of Bishops truly serving the cause of Christian unity?

Authentic Christian ecumenism should be defined by representatives of various Christian bodies witnessing to their respective churches' historic theological teachings, and looking for cooperation with other Christian traditions within the pale of orthodoxy.

Without whitewashing differences over important theological concerns, participants in ecumenical projects should seek cooperation and unity through evangelism, service to the poor and Christian witness in secular society. They should remember the Apostle Paul's teaching that despite differences, disciples of Jesus Christ are members of one body knit together in love, in which no one part can say to another, "I have no need of you" (1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Ephesians 4:1-16).

At its semi-annual meeting last fall, the Council of Bishops considered two candidates for ecumenical officer: Bishop William Morris, a supporter of traditional biblical standards for sexual morality, and Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader, one of the council's more outspokenly radical members. A majority of the active bishops elected the latter. Just three months before her election, Bishop Rader spoke at a national convocation of the Reconciling Ministries Network, the main unofficial caucus working to undermine the United Methodist Church's biblical teaching on marriage and sex.

As a speaker at the pro-homosexuality "Kairos CoMotion" conference in February 2002, Bishop Rader not only challenged the denomination's position on homosexuality but also approvingly quoted José Hobday, a New Age mystic and former teacher at the University of Creation Spirituality, in urging

participants to "take a step into yourself" and "take a step into mystery." She also endorsed a statement broadly denouncing "[t]he use of the term, 'heresy,' in our time" and defending the radical 1993 "Re-Imagining" conference that notoriously affirmed lesbianism, "sex among friends," and goddess worship.

The United Methodist Council of Bishops established the position of ecumenical officer in 1996, allowing a retired bishop to, in the words of the 2004 *Book of Discipline*, "be the primary liaison for the United Methodist Church" in "formal relations with other churches and/or ecclesial bodies." The position was initially filled by Bishop William Boyd Grove, who was replaced in 2000 by Bishop Melvin Talbert, who was succeeded in 2004 by Bishop William Oden.

Remarkably, almost all of the bishops selected for this position have pointedly declined to defend the official teachings of the United Methodist Church on marriage and sexual ethics. Bishop Grove was president of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC) in 1990 when it voted unanimously to affiliate with the "Reconciling" movement dedicated to undermining the denomination's teachings on homosexuality. After his tenure as ecumenical officer, he presided over the trial of the Rev. Karen Dammann, a "self-avowed practicing homosexual." The jury, dominated by pro-homosexuality activists, acquitted Dammann. Grove subsequently praised the "integrity" of the "fairly and honorably" reached verdict.

During his tenure as bishop of the California-Nevada Conference, Talbert was known to use his power to promote the homosexuality cause and to drive evangelicals out of the denomination, including numerous pastors and congregations.

Bishop Oden was not as radical as his predecessors during his term as ecumenical officer. But regretfully, he offered unquestioning support for the liberal ecumenical movement centered on the National Council of Churches. Unhelpfully, he ascribed criticism of the NCC to "radical right pressure groups, global conglomerates, and a variety of anti-middle class institutes and think tanks."

The bishops should realize that the abandonment of historic Christian teachings about marriage is counterproductive to ecumenical relations. As Bishop Lindsey Davis recently noted, any change in the denomination's current biblical teaching on homosexuality "would fracture our relationships with most Christian faith communities around the world."

It should seem obvious that an important prerequisite for authentically building unity with brothers and sisters in Christ outside of a denomination would be a deep and demonstrated commitment to building loving Christian unity among the diverse members within one's denomination. But all of the ecumenical officers have at various points dramatically conveyed the message, "I have no need of you," to huge portions of the United Methodist Church.

Will the Council of Bishops ever select an ecumenical officer who will advocate a genuine Christian ecumenism? With history as our guide, such a move in the near future appears unlikely. ☒



**John S. A. Lomperis** is completing four years of service as Research Associate for the UMAction program of the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

# A Different Kind of Education

by Dan Anderson

**F**or the past several months, I have had the distinct pleasure of serving on the staff here at the IRD. Last September, I was accepted as a part-time intern with the expectation of assisting Jim Tonkowich with his research and administrative tasks. However, when I arrived on my first day, I was ushered to my workspace in the middle of the office and have been caught up ever since in the incredibly varied everyday work that takes place here.

At this time last year, I was hurrying to finish my thesis and make arrangements for my family to attend my graduation. Like all of my peers facing the future, I spent a great deal of time contemplating the choices that

I would face; and like many, I had very little insight into what lay ahead. The four years that I set aside for my formal education afforded me opportunities and instruction that cannot be replaced; however, they provided me with little direction in the pursuit of a career.

After a number of cautious attempts to navigate the political fray that is Washington, DC, I was offered my present position. While uncertain what the internship would hold, I was interested in the goals of the organization and knew that it would be a valuable learning experience.

The result over the last few months has been an increasingly varied experience that allows me to have a hand in the many tasks of the IRD.

When there is ebb in the steady flow of research and writing projects, I have occasion to chip in with the communications team. When the IRD hosted an environmental conference last fall, I was able to assist in the event preparations and learned how a large group of people learns to negotiate deadlines.

From time to time, I also assist our donor relations director in the ongoing work of fundraising. With a limited amount of prior experience working at different levels of the government, I am

The real difference is in the people who have come along unexpectedly during this year to help show me the way, not always with a great deal of advice, but with a godly example of service and calling.

familiar with large and sometimes slow bureaucracies. Rather than fostering a tendency to be wasteful, I am learning about the limitations inherent in the management of a non-profit organization and the necessity of a well-functioning fundraising apparatus in order to keep it operating.

Apart from my direct involvement in the projects of the IRD directors, I have the opportunity every day to listen and participate in thought-provoking discussions on public policy, the state of American churches, and the struggles facing the nation. These rare opportunities give me the insight of those who have learned through decades of experience and not academia alone.

Alongside my internship, I have also

had the opportunity to continue my formal education with part-time theology classes in connection with the McLean Fellows program. In these, my classmates and I are invited to look into the Word and discover what direction there is for those of us who feel called into the workplace. We have professors and mentors who offer us advice and encouragement as we seek to do the will of the Lord and serve the Kingdom.

Through all of this, from being immersed in a new type of learning to the various tasks assigned to me, this year has given me a very different type of education. The liberal arts degree that I earned is necessary and valuable, but the classical education did little to help me figure out

where it is that I am meant to serve in this world or how I am to go about it.

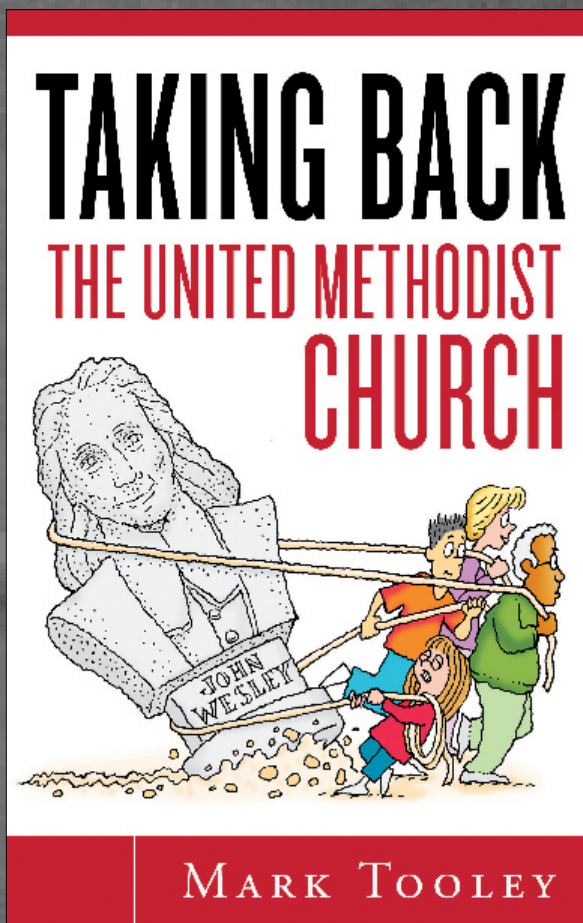
The real difference is in the people who have come along unexpectedly during this year to help show me the way, not always with a great deal of advice, but with a godly example of service and calling. Observing the inner workings of this organization and laboring alongside the staff has allowed me to observe those who live for the Lord while at the same time gaining a measure of practical experience that I would be hard pressed to find elsewhere. 📖

---

**Dan Anderson** is an intern through May 2008 at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.



## The fight for the United Methodist Church begins here...



Explore the history of the political and theological conflicts within the United Methodist Church as Mark Tooley takes you through his years of activism within the reform and renewal movement. Tooley offers not only perspective on the battles waged, but a vision for the future of United Methodism.

**“You don’t have to be a Methodist** to be intensely interested in the integrity of faith and life in a Christian community whose influence touches us all. We are indebted to Mark Tooley for this lively account of the heirs of John Wesley who are fighting the good fight.” —The Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, Editor-in-Chief, *First Things*

**“If you want to understand** all the controversies that have rocked the United Methodist Church for the past twenty years, this book is a must-read.” — Dr. William R. (Bill) Bouknight, retired former Senior Minister of Christ UMC, Memphis, and former President of the Confessing Movement