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Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

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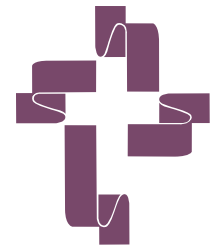


THE RELIGIOUS LEFT CELEBRATES

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- ▶ Afghanistan's Religious Landscape





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Marriage and God's Faithfulness

No sooner were the final markdowns put on leftover Christmas merchandise than bright red satin hearts lined the shelves to encourage a romantic Valentine's Day. Actually, of course, it is *Saint* Valentine's Day.

There is some question about who St. Valentine was since three early martyrs shared the name. The best guess seems to be that Valentinus was a priest in Rome around A.D. 270. One story says that the emperor, Claudius II, believed that single men made the best soldiers and so he forbade weddings. Valentinus performed weddings for Christian couples anyway in defiance of the emperor and was arrested and imprisoned. As a prisoner he won the emperor's favor until he attempted to convert Claudius to faith in Christ. His personal evangelism proved fatal. Claudius had Valentinus killed on February 14.

I know that February 14 is no longer St. Valentine's Day on the church calendar. Instead we remember Saints Cyril and Methodius, missionaries to the Slavic people. As someone of Russian descent, I appreciate Cyril and Methodius bringing the Gospel to my ancestors. At the same time, I like the idea of a saint who is associated with romantic love since, old-fashioned thinker that I am, I associate romantic love between a man and a woman with lifelong marriage.

That association between love and marriage is, in large measure, a Christian invention. According to Carrie Miles in her book *The Redemption of Love*, "Greco-Roman marriage was mostly a familial alliance designed to produce legitimate heirs, and concerns about power and family honor pervade every aspect of it."

Marriage was more of an economic, not a personal arrangement. Deals were struck between fathers giving brides in their early teens to men in their twenties or thirties. And while a wife might even have affection for her husband, everyone knew that her first allegiance was to her father's family, not her husband's. An element of suspicion and distrust pervaded every marriage.

The Christian teaching that husbands and wives should "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," and that wives were to respect their husbands and husbands to love their wives with self-sacrificial commitment (Ephesians 5:21-33) was wildly radical and all the more so given the reason behind those injunctions.

While marriage is important because it provides companionship, an outlet for sexuality, and a setting for procreation and rearing children, St. Paul made it clear that marriage is preeminently a picture of the love and fidelity between God and his people.

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

In the text, St. Paul so intermingles ideas about Christ and his Church with ideas about husbands and wives that it is difficult to pull the two topics apart. I suspect that this was precisely what the apostle intended. In his mind, formed as it was by the Hebrew Scriptures, marriage between a man and a woman tells a truth about God and his people. A particular marriage may tell the truth well or poorly, but every marriage tells the story.

The Book of Common Prayer wedding ceremony begins by reminding the couple and the congregation, "[Marriage] signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church..." Nothing more important or profound can be said about marriage. Just as each human is made in the image of God, every marriage is made in the image of God's faithfulness to his people. Small wonder that the Prayer Book goes on to say that it is "not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God."

There are times when we all wonder whether or not God is faithful. We may know that he has made a covenant with us that is sealed by the blood of Christ shed on the cross, but we doubt. When we see married couples, we have a picture of God's covenant faithfulness in the covenant faithfulness of husbands and wives. Their love and fidelity—inconsistent and imperfect as they may be—are an icon for the rest of us of God's perfect love and fidelity.

Marriage, however, has fallen on hard times and needs to be rescued—first and foremost in the Church. God's people need to be the bright spots in a declining marriage culture and we are not. Unless we understand and live out the high calling of Christian marriage, we will be able to do little to impact the debates over marriage in the wider culture.

That is why I am excited about the IRD's newest Mount Nebo Paper, "Is Marriage Worth Defending?" In it, Alan Wisdom looks at marriage and public policy beginning with the Bible and historic Christian teaching. It is must reading for any believer who cares about the future of marriage in the Church and in society.

While it is not as romantic as hearts and flowers, it puts love and marriage into the perspective that the Church and the culture so desperately need. ☞

Jim Tonkovich



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



International Briefs

Swedish Party Wants to Force Pastors to Perform Same-sex Weddings

A gender neutral marriage law currently under consideration by Sweden's parliament does not go far enough, according to a leftist party in the Scandinavian country. The leader of Sweden's Left Party, Lars Ohly, wants to include a provision to force pastors to wed gay couples.

Ohly told the Swedish newspaper *The Local*: "In the long run it's inappropriate to allow discrimination like this. We don't think that someone should be allowed to refuse to wed same-sex couples."

If Ohly has his way, a pastor who says no to marrying a gay couple would lose the right to perform wedding ceremonies.

Sweden's parliament has been considering the legalization of same-sex marriage for some time, with all but one of the represented political parties giving their support to a legislative proposal which would allow for same-sex marriages. Both the current proposal and the Left Party proposal would allow homosexual couples the right to be married in Sweden starting May 1, 2009.

The current measure allows pastors or other officiants to refuse to perform wedding ceremonies for gay couples if they so choose. ☞

China's Official Church Leaders Reach Out to House Churches

A key leader of China's officially recognized Protestant church has expressed hopefulness at the prospect of directly working with unregistered churches in the communist country.

"For those house churches without registration, we will try our best to be with them, to recognize them and to help them, so long as they have an orthodox faith, don't stray from the truth and don't follow heretics," Elder Fu Xianwei, chairperson of the National Three Self Patriotic Move-

ment (TSPM), told some 200 Hong Kong church leaders at an October seminar.

Fu was part of a 12-member delegation of the TSPM and the China Christian Council (CCC) that visited Hong Kong and Macau in October, their first visit since assuming the national leadership of their church organizations in January 2008.

According to Ecumenical News International, Fu, the leader of the delegation, said that the CCC/TSPM was willing to help house churches by, for example, providing them with Bibles, and also desired to work with them in building the Chinese Protestant church.

While the officially-sanctioned Chinese Protestant church estimates there are at least 18 million Protestants in China, officials have privately acknowledged that a much larger number of Protestants worship in unregistered congregations, although estimates of their size and reach vary widely. ☞

Christian Aid Worker Beheaded for Converting

CompassDirectNews reported that among 24 aid workers killed in Somalia in 2008,

at least one was beheaded in September specifically for converting from Islam to Christianity, among other charges.

Muslim extremists from the *al Shabab* group fighting the transitional government beheaded Mansuur Mohammed, 25, a humanitarian aid worker, before horrified onlookers of Manyafulka village.

The militants had intercepted Mohammed and a driver, who managed to escape, earlier in the morning. Sources close to Mohammed's family said he converted from Islam to Christianity in 2005. The eyewitness, who requested anonymity for security reasons, said the militants gathered the villagers of Manyafulka, telling them that they would prepare a feast for them. Five masked men emerged, carrying guns, wielding Somali swords and dragging the handcuffed Mohammed. One of the militants recited the Quran as he proclaimed that Mohammed was a "*murtid*," an Arabic term for one who converts from Islam to Christianity. Mohammed remained calm with an expressionless face and never uttered a word the eyewitness said. ☞

Allan Boesak Quits His "Anti-gay" Church in South Africa

Former President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches Allan Boesak has quit the General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) in a very public dispute. The anti-apartheid activist argued that the church should fully accept gay members, perform gay marriage ceremonies and allow ministers in gay relationships to serve in the church.

Boesak has never strayed far from controversy; in 1999 he was convicted of fraud and imprisoned. He was released in 2001 after having served only one year of his three-year sentence, and was reinstated as a cleric in 2004.

According to the South African Broadcasting Company, Boesak used the Belhar Declaration (an anti-apartheid statement adopted by the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1986) to defend his view that it was wrong to discriminate against homosexuals. One of the delegates then accused him of abusing the declaration.

In response, Boesak reportedly told the synod that in light of the "serious" accusation, he would resign from all his positions in the church. ☞



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY Washington, D.C., Healy Hall.
(© iStockphoto.com)

Study Finds Catholic Colleges Have Little Effect on Faith or Practices of Students

A survey of Catholic college students has found that most students on Catholic campuses reject key Catholic moral values and tenets of the faith, and significant numbers engage

in pre-marital sexual activity and the viewing of pornography.

Published by the Cardinal Newman Society's (CNS) Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education, the study was a random survey of current and recent students at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities, all between the ages of 18 and 29.

CNS says that it is the only known nationally representative survey of students at Catholic colleges and universities. CNS released a report five years ago, drawing on data from 38 Catholic colleges collected by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute. That study found that students' support for Catholic teaching on abortion, gay marriage, and other issues declined over four years at a Catholic institution.

"Most respondents say that the experience of attending a Catholic institution made no difference in their support for the Catholic Church or its teaching or their participation in Catholic sacraments," Steven Wagner of CNS wrote in his report. ☞

New OCA Primate is a Convert

The Orthodox Church in America has reached an historic landmark: the election of a convert as primate. Metropolitan Jonah, born James Paffhausen, was baptized an Episcopalian but converted to Orthodoxy while attending the University of California at San Diego.

The 49-year-old former Auxiliary Bishop of Dallas was elected by clergy, laity, and his fellow bishops at a Pittsburgh gathering in November and installed during a Washington, D.C., ceremony in December.

According to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jonah's election comes on the heels of his predecessor's sudden retirement in September when the church released an internal report detailing the disappearance of more than \$4 million in church funds under two successive administrations. The multi-ethnic Orthodox Church in America, which has Russian origins, has been plagued by scandal and Jonah's election is seen as a strong step towards reform. ☞

Middle School Messiah Sent Home from School Halloween Celebration

A CBS affiliate in New York has reported that a New Jersey teenager was sent home from school after his Halloween costume of Jesus Christ was judged "disruptive" by school officials.

The messiah look-alike, 13-year-old Alex Woinski, said he was inspired to wear the costume because friends said his long hair was similar to depictions of Christ's.

"I don't think I overreacted," said principal Joan Broe, who explained that the costume was a disruption, and denied its religious nature had anything to do with the matter.

Woinski's school says that while other students were ordered to alter their costumes because they were deemed inappropriate, this was the first time anyone had ever dressed up like Jesus. ☞

Barack Obama-Gene Robinson Conversations Reported

President Barack Obama sought out gay Episcopal bishop Gene Robinson not just

Church News

once but three times during his campaign to become president of the United States, *The Times of London* has reported.

The private conversations took place in May and June of 2008, when Obama sought out Robinson to discuss what it felt like to be "first." Robinson said he also discussed the risks incumbent upon being a high-profile leader with Obama.

"The first words out of [Obama's] mouth were: 'Well you're certainly causing a lot of trouble,'" said Robinson. "My response to him was: 'Well that makes two of us.'"

Robinson recounted that Obama had indicated his support for equal civil rights for gay and lesbian people and that he described the election as a "religious experience." ☞

Church Removes 'Scary Crucifix'

The BBC is reporting that a large sculpture of Christ on the cross has been removed from outside a church in West Sussex, UK, after its vicar said it was "scaring young children."

The crucifix, located at the side of St. John's Church, was "a horrifying depiction of pain and suffering" which was also "putting people off," according to the Reverend Ewen Souter. It was removed from the church just before Christmas and has been given to the Horsham Museum.

In a survey carried out by the church, every comment about the sculpture was negative.

"Children have commented on how scary they find it and how off-putting they find it as a symbol outside the church," Souter told the BBC.

Jeremy Knight, the museum's curator, said the powerful image portrayed by the figure was that of Christ in pain.

"That today isn't an image which a lot of churches want to follow," Knight said. "They'd much rather see an empty cross where Christ has risen." ☞



The Religious Left Celebrates

by Mark D. Tooley

Has the millennium arrived? Maybe Barack Obama's election to the presidency is giving the Religious Left at least a foretaste of it. After stewing with anger across eight years in the wilderness, liberal prelates are shouting hosanna in expectation of spiritual enlightenment during Mr. Obama's presidency.

The National Council of Churches leader, the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon wrote a congratulatory letter to Obama stating, "We at the National Council of Churches

urge all Americans to come together to uphold you with our hands, our hearts and our prayers." The NCC, previously the voice of America's premier religious denominations, once truly walked in the corridors of power, but it has never fully accepted its transition from mainline to sideline in America's religious demography. As recently as 1995, the NCC was invited to the White House to "pray" for President Clinton as he was resisting

the new Republican Congress. No doubt, the NCC is praying that its White House visitation rights will soon be restored.

While Kinnamon is an actual theologian and is apparently less political than his predecessors at the NCC, even he could not suppress his post-election excitement. "The leaders of this Council pledge to you

our unstinting support in the difficult days to come," he promised Obama. "We will regularly pray for you and others elected to high leadership. May your wisdom and discernment serve you well, and may your health never wane," Kinnamon wrote.

More typically, clergy would pray that God would grant a leader "wisdom and discernment." But since Kinnamon's letter suggested that Obama is already blessed with those traits in abundance, he prayed that those attributes would "serve [him] well." He helpfully informed Obama that the NCC is standing "ready to work with you to respond to the realities that a loving God places before us each day." And he shared that the justice principles that guide the NCC include "equal opportunities for justice, shelter, education, and health care" and the assertion that "war, even when it is necessary to defend ourselves or the weak or the oppressed, is never the will of God." Nearly every one of the NCC's over 30 member Protestant and Orthodox communions historically have subscribed to Christianity's just war tradition, which sometimes commands war as an imperative for justice. But Kinnamon, in typical religious left fashion, ignored his own tradition, and sophistically assumed that war is "never the will of God."

Maybe even more excitable than the NCC was the United Methodist Council of Bishops, who were meeting in Georgia during the election, and could barely contain their joy. Although President Bush was the first Methodist president since William McKinley, he was the target of routine denunciations by United Methodist officials.

"I fully expect the United Methodist Church, for the first time in many years, will be welcomed in the White House."

-Jim Winkler

The Bush White House responded by not issuing as many invitations to the church's officials as the bishops and others seemed to expect. So, understandably, according to the United Methodist News Service, the bishops were "jubilant" over Obama's election and "celebrated" with "tears, hymns and prayers," while "affirming his vision of change for the nation 'based on hope for all the people, especially those who are disinherited and disenfranchised.'"

The church's news report described the bishops behaving after Election Day almost as though it were Easter morning after Good Friday. Amid all the joy, the bishops "hugged and many cried," while "holding hands they sang 'My Lord, What a Morning' and the Negro anthem 'Lift Every Voice and Sing,' while many chanted 'Yes, we did!' — the phrase echoed during Obama's acceptance speech the night before."

United Methodism's chief lobbyist on Capitol Hill, Jim Winkler, who once called for President Bush's impeachment before retracting the call amid controversy, was also looking forward to ending his exile from White House events. "Barack Obama is a person of deep faith," he gushed. "I was reminded of that fact...when he made sure the (election night) festivities in Grant Park began with an invocation. I fully expect the United Methodist Church, for the first time in many years, will be welcomed in the White House."

Another likely White House religious visitor during the Obama years is Sojourners chief Jim Wallis, who has been feverishly attempting to create an evangelical left that would undermine evangelicals' traditional conservative voting habits. This new evangelical left, largely a repackaging of the old religious left for a new audience that cannot remember the 1960s, wants to persuade evangelicals that preventing global warming and opposing U.S. military actions is more important than upholding traditional marriage or opposing abortion.

Wallis claimed that his efforts were successful. "Polls leading up to the election showed a significant break from the previous generation on issues like gay marriage

and abortion, which while still a top concern, it is not the only one," he rejoiced. "For those Christians, sanctity of life now includes poverty, war, genocide, and climate change. Healthy families are also still a top concern, but many Christians don't see gay and lesbian rights as a primary cause of family breakdown." Wallis, an old 1960s student radical who now wants to be seen as a soothing centrist, claimed,



PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA Swearing in as the 44th President of the United States. (Tim Sloan/AFP Photo/Newscom)

"These religious voters refuse to be distracted by the culture wars of the previous generation."

According to Wallis, "This changing face of religion in America gave Barack Obama a 4.4 million voter net gain of Protestants and Catholics over John Kerry and helped lock up key swing states across the country." He cited increased evangelical support for Obama over John Kerry in 2004 in states such as Colorado and Indiana. There is some truth in Wallis' claim of changing faith. But the broader truth is that John McCain, who abjectly refused to discuss his own religious faith, still received 74 percent of the white evangelical vote, compared to Bush's 79 percent. Bill Clinton, who received about 30 percent of the evangelical vote, outperformed Obama. White evangelicals comprise about one quarter of the electorate.

As to the mainline Protestants, whose representatives at the NCC and the United

Methodist Church were so beside themselves, they too seemed to have preferred McCain over Obama. According to exit polls, non-evangelical Protestants favored McCain by 54 percent, compared to 56 percent for Bush in 2004. Obama's share of this group was 44 percent, identical to John Kerry's. Among all religious Americans, those who worship weekly or more preferred McCain by 55 percent, versus 43

percent for Obama. Obama's biggest gains were among the religiously unaffiliated, 75 percent of whom preferred him, compared to 67 percent for Kerry in 2004.

Seemingly, Jim Wallis and other fixtures of the religious left are attempting to persuade religious Americans to vote more like non-religious Americans. But Wallis, as he prepares for impending White House audiences, is unlikely to market his appeal so starkly. ❧

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ELECTION 2008

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CLOSING The GOD GAP?

Did Obama's Religious Outreach Payoff?

by Mark D. Tooley and Nalani E. Hilderman

The inauguration of President Barack Obama in January signaled the beginning of a new era in Washington. Many in the evangelical left who supported Obama during the election and promised votes are now seeking an audience with the president. Obama may acquiesce to such requests but the numbers show the religious left did not deliver what they promised.

Election results show that levels of religious practice remained a key indicator in voting preferences with the religiously observant still favoring the Republican Party, if only by slightly smaller margins than in 2004.

Evangelicals remained the strongest voting bloc for Republicans, giving 74 percent to John McCain, according to exit polls, compared to 79 percent for George W.

Many in the evangelical left who supported Obama during the election and promised votes are now seeking an audience with the president.

Bush in 2004. Non-evangelical Protestants favored McCain by 54 percent versus 56 percent for Bush. Catholics shifted as a whole from slight preference for Bush in 2004 to slight preference for Obama in 2008, though practicing Catholics remained more Republican.

The polls numbers are surprising considering that McCain's direct outreach to religious voters was minimal. Unlike Bush, he never publicly shared a personal religious testimony, preferring instead to recall a believing North Vietnamese prison guard when asked about his religion.

In contrast, Obama spoke openly of his faith in Jesus Christ, anxious to dispel rumors about Muslim beliefs,

and avoiding John Kerry's discomfort with religious talk in 2004. At an August rally in Lynchburg, VA, Jerry Falwell's hometown, Obama told a crowd of 2,000: "I believe in Jesus Christ as my savior."

Obama's religious outreach coordinator, Shaun Casey, led a "Faith, Family and Values" tour through Virginia's Shenandoah Valley during the campaign and touted Obama's faith. Although Obama was raised in a non-religious home, Casey told a crowd of 70 in Harrisonburg, VA, he became a Christian when a young man while working among Chicago's churches. Casey said: "It's been a part of his identity for all of his public life. He's been telling his own story of faith for years." "Somehow, we have allowed our party to be painted as the anti-God party," complained Casey, who teaches at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and who also advised the Kerry campaign in 2004.

Speaking to a far smaller audience of about 15 in Lynchburg, Casey promised that Obama would decrease the country's "level of fear and division and loathing" and "model the kind of pluralism that we long for today," according to the *Lynchburg News and Advance*. Casey also insisted that a President Obama would reduce abortions through universal health care and reduced poverty. But the Christian ethicist was enthusiastic that younger Christians would steer away from focusing on abortion and embrace a "basket of moral issues that is bigger—poverty, climate change and the national economy."

Religious activists for Obama emphasized that religious voters, especially evangelicals and Catholics, needed to

broaden beyond their supposed myopia over abortion and same-sex unions, issues on which Obama was decidedly more liberal than most in these demographics. But activists such as Casey perhaps partly failed to realize that most conservative religious people, especially evangelicals, are motivated already by a large “basket” of issues, and they are as conservative on economics and national security as they are on social issues.

In addition to Obama’s campaign officials, members of the evangelical left and some liberal Catholic voices aggressively promoted Obama as a Democrat deserving of enthusiasm from religious people. In a *Christianity Today* article from October 2008, Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, confided that Obama “understands evangelicals better than any Democrat since [Jimmy] Carter.”

But in the end, Obama’s greatest increase in support came not from the evangelical circles, but from the religiously nonobservant. Obama got 75 percent of the religiously unaffiliated vote while Kerry gained 67 percent in 2004. Sixty two percent of persons who never attend religious services supported Kerry, while 67 percent supported Obama. Fifty five percent of voters who worship weekly or more preferred McCain, compared to 61 percent for Bush in 2004 and 59 percent in 2000.

The religiously active retained their traditionally conservative voting patterns, which may pave a more difficult road inside the White House for the evangelical left. They simply did not provide the votes they had so long projected. ☞



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Top Evangelical Official Resigns

National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) chief lobbyist Richard Cizik won plaudits from the *New York Times* and criticism from his own constituency for shifting NAE to the left on global warming and other issues over the last six years. But after making controversial remarks about same-sex marriage during a National Public Radio (NPR) interview on December 2, 2008, Cizik resigned his post as chief NAE spokesman.

IRD has been a steady voice of concern about Cizik’s freelancing advocacy, and after hearing the interview issued a press release on December 10 calling for his resignation. The release questioned: “Is Richard Cizik representing typical members of the Assemblies of God, the Salvation Army, or the Presbyterian Church in America, along with millions of other evangelicals, when he suggests, even momentarily, support for liberal issues like civil unions? If not, why is he NAE’s chief spokesman? Should not that spokesman consistently espouse traditional evangelical beliefs?” Cizik’s resignation was announced the following day.

NAE’s Washington, D.C.-based Government Affairs Office sets its policy direction on issues before Congress, the White House, and Supreme Court. Cizik served NAE for 28 years and over the last 10 years had become the organization’s main public voice.

Since 2004, Cizik increasingly urged evangelicals to shed their traditional political identity with social conservatism and pushed new issues like climate change, nuclear disarmament, and alleged systematic U.S. torture of terrorism suspects. He gained publicity for his activism against global warming, despite instructions from the NAE executive committee to take no position on the issue. But his push on same-sex unions apparently overstepped the bounds of NAE’s patience.

During the December 2 interview Cizik was asked about an NPR interview of two years ago when he asserted opposition to same-sex marriage. When questioned if his response was still the same, Cizik told National Public Radio (NPR): “I’m shifting, I have to admit. I would willingly say I believe in civil unions. I don’t officially support redefining traditional marriage, I don’t think.”

Cizik additionally suggested a new perspective for NAE on marriage. “Maybe we need to reevaluate this and look at it a little differently,” he told NPR, offering that evangelicals should be “willing to give the biblical view a different slant” and focus on “building values in our own movement” rather than opposing same-sex unions. Comparing the issue to climate change, he added, “If you don’t change the way you think and adapt...you may ultimately be a loser.”

Evangelicals have strongly supported ballot referendums defining marriage as being between one man and one woman. The NAE, in official statements in 2004, opposed “innovations such as same-sex marriage,” and decried homosexuality as a “deviation from the Creator’s plan for human sexuality.”

Following the controversial interview, the NAE publicized that Cizik had offered his “deep regret and apology” over the NPR comments. But criticism within NAE continued to build in the nine days between the NPR broadcast and the resignation.

The IRD wishes Cizik well and knows that his long history of service to evangelicals in Washington, D.C., will have laid the groundwork for many opportunities. Simultaneously, the IRD hopes NAE can now refocus on theological and ethical convictions that evangelicals hold strongly in common. This is particularly important when those convictions are being challenged in the public square. ☞

General Board of Global Ministries Gears Up and Gives Grants

by Rebekah M. Sharpe

United Methodism's largest agency inaugurated a new leader and approved grants for left-wing political advocacy at its bi-annual meeting in October 2008. Resolutions affirming abortion rights and opposing U.S. border control were also approved when the 90 directors met in Stamford, Connecticut.

The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) has long been one of the church's most controversial agencies because of its political activism and frequent preference for humanitarianism over evangelism.

Overseeing the church's global missionary force, women's ministry, and disaster relief efforts, the board enables many United Methodists to carry out the mission of "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." But political stumbling blocks often create a distraction from that mission and the October meeting was no exception.

Women's Division

Leading the charge was Inelda Gonzalez, the President of the Women's Division board, who reported on the actions taken at the UMW meeting a week prior. The Women's Division "reaffirmed...strong support for reproductive health and freedom [access to abortion] for all women, both in the United States and around the world," she reported. Offering no scriptural support for their staunchly and divisively pro-abortion views, UMW leaders instead cited an institutional platform from the "United Methodist church's new quadrennial foci, which is 'improving health globally'" as cover for their support.

Gonzalez also reported that on behalf of its membership, the Women's Division approved "a campaign...to educate and advocate on behalf of a single-payer health plan in the United States." The program would use the witness of United Methodist Women to do grassroots lobbying in favor of socialized healthcare.

Israel/Palestine

Following closely behind the Women's Division in stumbling blocks were the GBGM board members who approved grants favoring Palestinians over Israelis. These grants perpetuated GBGM's historic partiality, so recently evidenced in its controversial missions study that referred to Israelis as "hysterical" and "paranoiac." While no ministry to any Israeli individuals or with any Israeli organizations was considered for funding, no less than nine grants went to Palestinian ministries or advocacy groups.

For example, the political advocacy group "U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation" has worked closely with the Women's Division for some time and received \$5,000 in GBGM grants. The group rejects Israel's right to self-defense and supports "comprehensive divestment" from Israeli economic interests.

UMC Protects the 'Right' to Immigrate Illegally

During the GBGM meeting, the denomination's tendency to denounce the U.S. government for enforcing its immigration regulations continued. The October 2008 Mission Program Updates book boasted that the General Conference "adopted two new, comprehensive resolutions on migration/immigration."

UM Bishops Hail Obama Election, Mostly Avoid Comment on Homosexual Ordination

by Rebekah M. Sharpe

Meeting during the week of November 1-7, 2008, the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church was able to respond immediately to the election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States of America. The bishops were open about their enthusiasm for the new president during their morning worship service on November 5, 2008, some of them shouting “Yes, we can!,” an Obama campaign slogan.

Throughout the week, bishops spoke of bearing witness to “the hope within.” Bishop Linda Lee of the Wisconsin Annual Conference led the prayer before communion, where she thanked God for “the privilege of this day, standing on the precipice of a new age. We give You thanksgiving for the way the people of this country have spoken.” After the service ended, Lee spoke as the chair of the Council of Bishops’ Anti-Racism Task Force. She reminded the bishops that in the face of racism “Obama says that we have to change!” Lee challenged them to “think about what that means” and “[t]ry to receive the change that we have a

chance to make right now!”

The following day, the exultation continued. Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Chicago Episcopal Area declared, “The part of the faith that I had in America which was lost has now been restored.” He recalled that, growing up in Korea and then coming to the United States, “We believed in what America meant to the world.” However, he said, “My faith in America began to crack as I learned, noticed and experienced racism and other kinds of injustice all around me, and it was shaken when the war in Iraq started, and it was crushed when I found out that my government practiced and legitimized torture.” But following the election, Jung said, “I believe in America again.”

The bishops prepared an official letter congratulating the president-elect, and requested a meeting with Obama once he takes office. A Bible, signed by the bishops, was sent with the letter to Obama, which is a tradition for the bishops and new presidents. They included a small sentence, expressing their hope that God “will be with you as you shoulder the mantle of presidential leadership

as the first African-American.”

Shadowed by the jubilation of the election results, the bishops also discussed how to respond to retired Bishops Susan Morrison and Jesse DeWitt’s participation in an October ordination of a lesbian minister for the Church within a Church movement. The response prepared by the bishops acknowledged that an ordination of a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” did take place, and reiterated that “The United Methodist Church is clear that it does not ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals (United Methodist Book of Discipline, paragraph 304.3).” It continued: “This “ordination” has no effect within the United Methodist Church and was not approved by any annual conference, or by any Board of Ordained Ministry, or by any cabinet.”

While the ordination was not authorized by the UMC, the presence of Bishops Morrison and DeWitt, and a letter from retired Bishops Judith Craig and Leontine Kelly, seemingly sanctioned the event. The council, however, did not acknowledge its members’ role in that service. ☞

The measures downplayed the responsibility of government to monitor who crosses its borders, and were favorable to the “sanctuary” movement in which churches harbor an illegal immigrant whom the government is seeking to deport.

Most United Methodists would likely agree that the current system of immigration is broken, and that the church should care for immigrant families. But whether all United Methodists would match the extremity of Global Ministries by putting all the blame on the U.S. government’s attempts to enforce its border security laws, or advocate what seem to be the ambiguously open-borders policies popular in certain United Methodist agencies, appears doubtful.

Nevertheless, GBGM staff ensured

that the anti-enforcement attitude of the agency would continue by preparing an October 14 memo that contained these church-wide resolutions that object to criminalizing illegal immigration and call for “work through the [United Methodist] Interagency Task Group on Immigration for the demilitarization [presumably removing of the wall, checkpoints, and guards] along the U.S./Mexico border. In particular we oppose the construction of further walls and other obstacles on the border that endanger lives of immigrants [who are attempting to cross illegally].”

New Leadership

Inaugurated as the newly elected GBGM general secretary, Ed Paup shared that the Methodist mission “is not only about

us...” but is “for the sake of the planet, for the sake of peace, and for the sake of the poor.” The church is “in need of a missional ‘extreme makeover,’” Paup stated, “an extreme missional makeover for justice and peace for all of God’s children.” It appears that the agency has already geared up to shift its mission from “making disciples for Jesus Christ” to leading the charge for left wing political movements. ☞



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Afghanistan's Religious Landscape

by Faith J.H. McDonnell

The world was shocked last October by the murder of Gayle Williams by Taliban enforcers in Afghanistan. Williams, 34, was walking to her office in Kabul when she was shot dead by two men on a motorcycle.

Murder always shocks, especially the murder of someone who is doing good for others. Williams was in Afghanistan with the British-based Christian aid organization SERVE (Serving Emergency Relief and Vocational Enterprises) helping handicapped Afghans. In a country where Christians are not allowed to “preach,” her loving service was an eloquent silent testimony.

But the murder of a Christian in Afghanistan is not really surprising. A recent U.N. report showed 120 attacks on foreign aid workers in the first 7 months of 2008. Thirty of those attacks ended in death. And, in the summer of 2007 two Korean Christian hostages held by the Taliban were killed. Like the Koreans, Williams was killed for “spreading Christian propaganda,” Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid’s told the Associated Press: “This woman came to Afghanistan to teach Christianity to the people of Afghanistan. Our [leaders] issued a decree to kill this woman.”

Notorious during its years of power for oppression and abuse the Taliban is once again shaping Afghanistan’s religious landscape. Now it is also flexing its legislative muscle. In April 2008, a group of Taliban-style parliamentarians introduced a bill banning such “un-Islamic” behaviors as jeans, loud music, t-shirts, video games, Indian soap operas, jewelry for men, and make-up. If acted upon, the bill would also enforce separation of men and women in public.

It had been hoped that Afghanistan would be free of Talibanization after 2001, rather than moving back towards it. With U.S. support the Northern Alliance routed handily the thug theocrats during the first battles of the War on Terror and Afghanistan held great promise. Unfortunately, some western scholars advised the U.S. government not work for Afghan acceptance of a secular democracy. Their advice led to the approval of a constitution on January 4, 2004, in which Islam became the “religion of the state” and “no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam.”

Apologists remonstrate that it is acceptable for Afghanistan to enshrine Islamic law (*shari’a*) in the constitution because it is moderated by other provisions that say that the state will abide by international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that it has signed. But these other provisions are abrogated by articles two and three of the constitution. Article Two states, “Followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites *within the limits of the provisions of law*” (emphasis added). And Article Three adds, “In Afghanistan, no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam.”

Shari’a not only permits, but demands discrimination against non-Muslims. In his October 2, 2008, article author Robert Spencer says that in *shari’a*, the “People of the Book” (Christians and Jews) must be “invited” to enter Islam. If they refuse, they must be fought until they convert, are killed, or are forced to pay the *jizya* (a special tax for non-Muslims that spares their lives but humiliates them as subjugated, second-class citizens). Spencer continues,

“*Shari’a* is therefore a direct challenge to the idea that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights...While Jews, Christians, and other non-Muslims are allowed to practice their religions, they must do so under severely restrictive conditions that remind them of their second-class citizen status at every turn.”

While foreign aid workers can choose whether or not to be in an environment hostile to their faith, Afghan Christians and other non-Muslims have fewer options. In the case of converts to Christianity from Islam, the choice is rather stark. Within *shari’a*, conversion from Islam is punishable by death. It is equivalent to treason against the state.

This reality was brought home in 2006 when Abdul Rahman was arrested for the crime of leaving Islam for Christianity. An international cry of outrage spurred the Afghan government to find a face-saving solution that rescued Rahman from death.

We must pray for God to bring true religious freedom to Afghanistan. And we must continue to be vigilant advocates for individuals threatened by *shari’a*. Although we missed the opportunity we had to help change Afghanistan’s religious landscape, we can work to rescue those who like Abdul Rahman are victims of its harsh and intolerant laws. ☞



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What Should a Church's Washington Office Do?

by Alan F.H. Wisdom

In late 2007 the Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory, longtime director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office, left that position to take a job with the World Council of Churches. The PCUSA General Assembly Council is taking its time in filling the vacant position. Indeed, the council has taken this opportunity to study the mission of the Washington Office.

This is a wise approach—and one that other churches might consider. Why do more than a dozen denominations have offices in D.C.? Whom do these offices serve? What are their political objectives?

These are important questions. We in Presbyterian Action and the IRD believe we have something to contribute to the discussion, based on 25 years of observing the PCUSA Washington Office and its counterparts in other denominations.

What we have observed is a pattern: An issue attracts attention among our nation's "progressive" elites. They decide that something must be done—a new government entitlement, a new United Nations treaty, another U.S. intervention to be stopped.

Presbyterian progressives decide that the church has to pitch in for the cause. So they turn to the Washington Office. It consults with like-minded left-leaning offices of other denominations: the United Methodists, the Evangelical Lutherans, the United Church of Christ, and so forth. Since most of these offices are located in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, these kinds of consultations occur on a daily basis.

The various denominational offices divide the labor of lobbying. Speaking in the name of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Washington Office writes Congress to demand passage of this or that piece of legislation. It sends out alerts requesting its list of Presbyterian activists to lobby their members of Congress for the same legislation.

That list comprises only a few thousand of the 2.1 million PCUSA members, and they are almost all on the liberal side of the spectrum. Likewise, the agenda that they and the Washington Office promote is closely aligned with the left wing of the Democratic Party.

Washington Office publications present information and arguments to support only the position that they favor. Read-

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ers are rarely told why some reasonable people might take another position. Most of the argumentation is secular. References to Scripture and the PCUSA confessions are few and mostly ornamental.

In some cases, the Washington Office can cite a General Assembly resolution endorsing the legislation that it favors. In most cases, however, the office can point only to vague assembly language about helping the poor, seeking peace, and so forth. It gives the impression that the legislation it favors is the only way to advance those goals.

Sometimes experience will prove the Washington Office to have been right; at other times, it will be proven wrong. One has to wonder about a supposed prophetic voice with such a mixed record. But the deeper problem is this: Even if the Washington Office were right 100 percent of the time, it would still not be effective.

PCUSA Research Services reports

that, among PCUSA members, Republicans outnumber Democrats by 53 to 27 percent. Politicians on Capitol Hill can count votes, and they know that the Washington Office does not represent Presbyterian voters. Its real constituency is miniscule, and therefore the politicians can safely ignore it.

Isn't there a better way to run a church's Washington Office? We at the IRD would say yes. Here is a different approach:

We should take to heart the new "missional" understanding that the front line of the church's ministry is the local congregation. The Washington Office should enable PCUSA members to make their own political witness. It should not principally be about making its own pronouncements in the name of those members.

The Washington Office should serve all PCUSA members—not just the liberal activists. Its publications should stress the biblical and confessional teachings that Presbyterians hold in common. When the office presents information and arguments on a particular issue, it should fairly represent different positions held by faithful Presbyterians. It should let church members make up their own minds on particular legislation.

The Washington Office should be truly ecumenical and non-partisan. It needs to break out of the tight networks of left-leaning staff in the United Methodist Building. Our PCUSA office should be cooperating as frequently with Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists as it does with Episcopalians and the United Church of Christ. It should be aligned with the Republicans as often as with the Democrats. ☞



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A New North American Anglican Province Emerges

by Jeffrey H. Walton

On an early December evening, representatives from four Episcopal dioceses and several Anglican groups met in Wheaton, Illinois for a major event: the release of a draft constitution for a new, unified Anglican church in North America. While the provisional constitution is not slated for adoption until a convention this summer, the night could be looked back on as a momentous one: the moment when various Anglican factions stopped splitting apart and started getting back together, all with the shared goal of spreading the Gospel.

The Anglican Communion is a federation of 38 autonomous national churches, all descended from the missionary activities of the Church of England and existing in relationship with each other through a series of connectional meetings. Each national church is organized as a “province” (although some provinces cover multiple nations). To date, the Episcopal Church has had exclusive claim on the Anglican franchise in the United States.

Two significant changes have helped lead to the creation of a new North American Anglican province, however.

First, the Common Cause Partners (CCP), a loose federation of eight conservative Anglican bodies, organized a college of bishops in 2007. Composed of the Anglican Communion Network (ACN), which enveloped a large faction of conservative parishes and dioceses within the Episcopal Church, the partnership also brought in the Rwandan-sponsored Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMiA) and the Nigerian-sponsored Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA). The partnership has simultaneously attracted low-church bodies such as the Reformed Episcopal Church along with Anglo-Catholic high-church bodies like Forward in Faith North America.

The CCP created a mechanism through which bishops began talking to each other with regularity, and clergy began sharing and joint missions and development part-

nerships took hold. The CCP mission statement includes as one of its four points: “to ensure an orthodox Anglican Province in North America that remains connected to a faithful global Communion.”

In an October 15, 2008, article in the *Washington Post*, Michelle Boorstein reported that after decades of being tiny, separate splinter groups, breakaway congregations “have begun working together, have held their first summits with their overseas allies and are seeking recognition as their own U.S. church.” Peter Frank, a spokesman for CCP, told Boorstein that the group comprised more than 580 congregations made up of more than 100,000 people.

Steffen Johnson, an attorney who attends the Falls Church in Virginia and is also co-counsel for the breakaway churches said, “A lot of people’s willingness to take a step away from the Episcopal Church depends on the existence of a place to go. Now people who are leaving and people who have left can say, ‘Let’s join together.’ It builds momentum.”

GAFCON Primates’ Council

The second development that has accelerated the establishment of a new North American province was the successful Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), which met in Jerusalem in 2008 and established a Primates’ Council. This grouping of Global South primates represents the vast majority of Anglicans in the world; it also provides a new authoritative instrument within the Anglican Communion alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Previously, groups held an Anglican identity primarily via their recognition by and relationship with the See of Canterbury. When over 200 bishops boycotted the 2008 Lambeth Conference, it issued a clear challenge to the Archbishop of Canterbury’s traditional role as the primary facilitator between these national churches and the touchstone of Anglican unity. Where

Canterbury might be reluctant to alienate the Episcopal Church by recognizing a new North American Anglican Province as a co-equal, recognition by the GAFCON Primates’ Council of such a province would create the *de-facto* recognition of the province’s legitimacy across much of the Anglican communion.

A communiqué issued following the first meeting of the Primates’ Council in London in August said that the twofold task of the Council is “to authenticate and recognize confessing Anglican jurisdictions, clergy and congregations and to encourage all Anglicans to promote the gospel and defend the faith.” The primates also said that in developing the GAFCON movement, “it is expected that priority will be given to the possible formation of a province in North America for the Common Cause Partnership.”

Next Steps

With domestic Anglican groups organizing, and a new authority within Anglicanism posed to recognize a new province, things seem to be speeding along. In June 2009 an inaugural provincial assembly will meet at St. Vincent’s Cathedral in Bedford, Texas. The business of the assembly will be to perfect and adopt the proposed constitution and canons. Following that, each member diocese or convocation will need to accept the founding documents.

Once the new province is established and the conventions of the constituent dioceses have ratified membership, the dioceses and churches currently under the oversight of foreign provinces will transfer their membership to the Anglican Church in North America. ☒



Jeffrey H. Walton is the Communications Manager at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

On the Other End of the Telephone

by David P. Sheaffer

I have been blessed to serve as the Director of Donor Relations for two years now. While there are many aspects of my job that I like, the most rewarding area would be the opportunity to interact with donors. Whether I am on the phone, exchanging e-mail, or talking face to face, I love to hear the stories about how things are going for our partners and in your churches.

Sometimes the stories are encouraging, other times they are infuriating, but I am usually amazed with how our donors respond no matter what the circumstances. Through these conversations, I have discovered some common characteristics among a lot of our donors. I thought I would share some of these traits that I have noticed. Perhaps you embody some of these as well. I'd be curious to know if you see any of them in yourself.

There is a real heart for the church. I often hear comments from folks that reveal their heart for the church. Sometimes they are comments about the local church, or their specific denomination, but more frequently it is a deeper commitment to the Church universal. It seems in today's culture there is a growing number of Christians that somehow feel we are in a post-Church era, and that their relationship with God can blossom beyond the walls of a church community. That is not the way our partners see it, and even those that have been forced out of their local congregation because of heresies, recognize their situations are not ideal, and long for the blessings found in a community of believers.

There is a sober understanding that these battles are going to be a long haul. Popular culture constantly attempts to find immediate solutions to life's dilemmas—whether it is shedding those extra pounds in “three minutes a day,” running up credit cards instead of saving first and buying second, or even “speed dating” so you can make it through ten first dates in

one evening. TV shows and advertising are often the embodiment of the quick fix. I love the show, 24, where Jack Bower solves the world's crises in one day. If only I could be so productive.

But real life rarely has quick fixes, and church life, for whatever reason, often seems to go into slow motion when problems arise. Most folks I talk with “get this.” It's not that I don't pick up on the desire for resolution and for things to move at quicker pace. But, I am just as likely to hear steely resolve in your voices, recog-



nizing that the battles in the church will take time, that each generation of Christians before us has faced crises in the faith, and that the one area we can control is our individual response and witness.

There is a sense of missionary service. While many of our donors are blessed to be in strong evangelically-minded congregations, just as many find themselves as “missionaries” to their local congregations. They are in churches that have lost their way and forgotten the “good news.” These are the folks I try to remember in prayer, because they often go it alone.

Missionaries that are “officially” sent usually have financial and prayer part-

ners, administrative and pastoral support, and colleagues to commiserate with, but this type of service is different. These “missionaries” are people that have developed a heart to see the Gospel change their congregation without any of the traditional supports, and they are coming up against folks who think they already “have the answers.” The hardest folks to reach are those that don't recognize their neediness.

My sense from my conversations is, it seems that those who are able to continue in those settings successfully have found other ways to be spiritually nourished while remaining in the community they love.

There is also a sense of humor. For many folks that stay engaged on these issues appreciating gallows humor—the ability to find something funny in an otherwise despairing moment—seems to be common. Without it, you can simply become embittered and unable to see the potential for change, or fall into despair and give up the fight. But a lot of our donors can find a daisy in the darkness, and strength from a higher power.

But, I will also occasionally come across donors who feel very isolated, as though they are on a shoreline trying to stop a rising tide singlehandedly. I want to assure you that you're not alone. There are thousands of others that share your concerns and commitments. More importantly, there is a Creator, on your side, who controls the tides.

Thanks for letting me get to know you these past two years, I look forward to our future conversations. ☞



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

MARRIAGE



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