



# faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

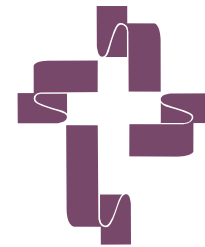
Summer 2012

## Chains of Love? Church Conventions Battle over Marriage

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An Unholy Compromise**
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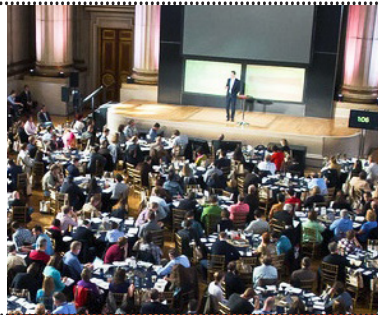




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COVER: Outside the 2012 United Methodist General Conference in Tampa, Florida, the Rev. Amy DeLong holds chains in her hand as she and other homosexual activists hold a silent vigil as delegates and visitors leave an April 26 session. (photo: Paul Jeffrey/UMNS)

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Above, left: Bishops Judith Craig (left) and Rosemarie Wenner (center) negotiate with the Rev. Amy DeLong after dozens of homosexual activists took over the floor of a May 3 session of the 2012 United Methodist General Conference in Tampa, Florida. The bishops talked with DeLong in an attempt to resolve the situation without resorting to arrests. (photo: John Goodwin/UMNS)



# Contraceptive Evangelicals?

Recently *World* magazine editor Marvin Olasky exposed the National Association of Evangelicals' funding by the pro-choice Hewlett Foundation via the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, which emphasizes contraceptive distribution. NAE received about \$1 million over several years, comprising a large chunk of NAE's annual budget, which is only about \$1 million a year. The San Francisco Bay area based Hewlett Foundation funds Planned Parenthood, the Abortion Access Project, and Global Warming activism, including influencing evangelicals for climate causes.

Thanks to Hewlett, an NAE-sponsored panel at the prestigious "Q" conference in April in Washington, D.C., for young evangelical elites almost exclusively emphasized contraceptive distribution, including to unmarrieds. (See Kristin Rudolph's story, page 11.) Afterwards, a poll of several hundred listeners showed most favoring church support for disseminating contraceptives to young unmarrieds, which fueled publicity that young evangelicals are more permissive in their sexual beliefs. The argument for the campaign is that it will reduce abortion.

NAE President Leith Anderson, a retired Minnesota megachurch pastor, insisted NAE affirms traditional Christian sexual teachings. "We never want to promote or condone sexual immorality," he said. "But, we are told that contraceptives can reduce abortions and we want to stop abortions."

But the question is more about emphasis. The NAE was once a traditional, conservative evangelical voice that largely represented consensus opinion among evangelicals in denominations like the Assemblies of God and the Presbyterian Church in America. When longtime NAE chief Billy Melvin retired in 1994 after nearly three decades, a vacuum arose within NAE. He was briefly succeeded by an Assemblies of God official and then a Free Methodist bishop. Eventually Colorado megachurch pastor Ted Haggard took the helm in 2003 until his 2006 sexual scandal. In the 1990s, NAE struggled over its budget, partly because of expenses in moving from Chicago to Los Angeles. In 2003 NAE relocated to Washington, D.C.

My late and revered predecessor as president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Diane Knippers, was an active Anglican lay woman who joined the NAE board in the 1990s and served until her death in 2005. From the start she was concerned about NAE's drift to the left. She joked that it was almost a full-time job counteracting the liberal influence of her friend Ron Sider, head of Evangelicals for Social Action. One NAE president became publicly close to then National Council of Churches chief Joan Brown Campbell, with whom he journeyed to China, and where neither ostensibly found much evidence of religious persecution. Diane discerned that many NAE leaders were very nice Christian people who were often politically

naive and susceptible to influence by whomever. Some on the Left rightly saw the leadership void and naïveté, coupled by a craving for wider respectability, as an opportunity.

NAE's long-time Washington, D.C., representative Richard Cizik embodied NAE's new direction. As NAE chiefs came and went, he became NAE's most prominent voice. And he became an icon of Global Warming activism, infamously earning a 2006 full-page photo in *Vanity Fair* magazine, in which he was walking on water against an apocalyptic backdrop. Cizik went too far in 2008 when he endorsed same-sex civil unions during a national radio interview with NPR's Terry Gross. By then, Leith Anderson had become president, and he quickly dispatched Cizik.

But Anderson has continued NAE's liberal political slant, adopting stances against U.S. enhanced interrogation techniques on terrorists, backed cooperation with pro-choice groups in a common quest for reducing abortion, endorsed Comprehensive Immigration Reform with an emphasis on legalizing illegal aliens, and issued a denunciation of nuclear weapons strongly implying the U.S. should disarm. And Anderson recently declined to endorse the current Minnesota marriage amendment even while quickly backing President Obama's new policy of selective non-enforcement of immigration law.

Presumably Anderson thinks NAE's leftward slant will appeal to a younger, broader evangelical audience. But likelier it will instead follow the path to obsolescence that the National Council of Churches began 50 years ago by speaking TO instead of FOR its own constituency. Today both NCC and NAE seemingly rely on foundation dollars because their own churches' support is insufficient. Will NAE survive? Should it survive? Its own members need to answer that question. But increasingly American church goers are less interested in centralized church structures, especially groups like the NAE and NCC founded 60 and 70 years ago.

*Mark Tooley*



Mark D. Tooley is the President of the Institute on Religion & Democracy and the Director of UMAction.



## International Briefs

### Nigerian Christians Stand Up Against Boko Haram

Nigerian Christians continue to face violent attacks by the Islamist terrorist organization, Boko Haram. The *Christian Post* reported that on June 3 alone, 21 people were killed while 45 others were injured in a church bombing. Suffering well over a year of sustained attacks, Christians in Nigeria are considering fighting back.

Others call upon divine judgment. “We serve a God of vengeance who has vowed to avenge the saints. He will descend his instrument of death on the camp of the enemy. We invoke the vengeance of God on the radical Islamic group Boko Haram and their sponsors,” declared Pentecostal Bishop David Oyedepo. “We decree that this week is a week of vengeance and God will unleash his instrument of death on their camp. This month is a month of vengeance and so we release arrows of humiliating deaths on them.”



### Taliban Persecutes Pakistani Christians

The Christians of Pakistan, already an alienated minority, face yet more hardship at the hands of Afghani and Pakistani Pashtun militants. Islamists pushed out of Afghanistan have been flooding into southern Pakistan’s Sindh Province. This “Talibanization” of the area has led not only to the usual religious bullying but also beatings, Bible burnings, extortion, kidnappings, and shootings.

According to a *FrontPage Magazine* article, one Christian in the area said that southern Pakistan’s Christians seem abandoned even by Christian mission and relief groups. Most international ministries and human rights organizations tend to target northern Pakistan, perhaps under the assumption that northern conditions are far worse.

### Church of England Clashes with State on Marriage

On June 12, the Church of England officially denounced same-sex marriage in a 13-page submission. The declaration came as a response to the government’s consultation on redefining matrimony

as between a man and a woman. With Prime Minister David Cameron’s push for legalized same-sex marriage by 2015, canon law may find itself in conflict with the state, perhaps costing the church its role of conducting weddings on behalf of the government.

The document reads, “Such a move [to redefine marriage] would alter the intrinsic nature of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, as enshrined in human institutions throughout history .... Marriage benefits society in many ways, not only by promoting mutuality and fidelity, but also by acknowledging an underlying biological complementarity which, for many, includes the possibility of procreation.” The church also worried the government proposal would “hollow out” marriage into “a content free, consumerist agreement.”

### Kenyan Roman Catholics Oppose Birth Control Push

Kenyan bishops of the Roman Catholic Church have beseeched the government to abstain from participating in the global push for artificial birth control. The ecclesiastical leaders expressed their concern for the

policy’s effects on the family and social morals. This July 20 statement was drafted in response to the country’s signing on to a family planning campaign revealed at a population summit hosted in Great Britain. This agreement required that contraceptives be provided for at least 120 million women and girls in developing countries by 2020.

“The drive by foreign agencies ... to target millions of girls and women in Africa for the artificial family planning ... is unimaginable, dangerous, and could lead to the destruction of human society,” the bishops contended. ENI News quoted Cardinal John Njue as saying, “It is not clear why such a large amount of money is being used on contraceptives, while many women are dying daily due to lack of proper medical care, food, and housing.”

### Indian Christians Demand Equal Rights

On August 1, five thousand Christians gathered in New Delhi to protest discrimination against Christian dalits. Converted dalits—the lowest rung of “untouchables” in the Indian caste system—face even more oppression than Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs of the same class. In 1950, the Indian government cordoned off 15 percent of the places in schools and government jobs as well as free education for Hindu dalits. These same privileges were granted to Sikhs in 1956 and Buddhists in 1990.

According to ENI News, the five-hour sit-in near the Indian Parliament had been organized by the National Council of Dalit Christians and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic church members voiced their disapproval of their unequal treatment. “The government is crucifying us,” declared Roman Catholic archbishop Malayappan Chinnappa (a member of the dalit caste), “The constitution and the courts also have failed to uphold our fundamental rights.”



## Church News

### Mohler Stands Up for Marriage

"We have the only message that is running counter to the wisdom of the age" regarding human sexuality, said Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. In his address to the April 2012 Together for the Gospel conference, he declared, "[W]e believe quite in contrast to [the civil definition of marriage] in many jurisdictions. We cannot say what the civil government now says about marriage. We not only need to say more, but we need to say something that is radically different."

The seminarian observed how cultural consensus stood against homosexuality up until the 1950s, only to rapidly transform into censures against anyone who would oppose the LGBT agenda. Mohler argued, "God gave certain institutions that maximize human flourishing, the subversion of which lead to human misery ... We're going to have to stand for marriage in terms of its actual reality ... what has actually worked in human history." ■

### Southern Baptists Elect First Black President

This June, the Southern Baptist Convention voted in Fred Luter, Jr., its first black president. The unanimously-elected Luter marks a historical precedent. The SBC was founded in 1845 out of a split from northern Baptists regarding the ownership of slaves. In a *Baptist Press* article, the new executive commented, "Here is a convention that has been talking this racial reconciliation thing and now they're putting their money where their mouth is." Luter received enthusiastic support from the nearly 7,700 messengers of the convention.

At the same convention, messengers overwhelmingly passed a resolution affirming the soteriological stance of the "Baptist Faith and Message," thus striking down any moves to root out Calvinist Baptists. Additionally, the SBC retained its current name instead of "Great Commission Baptists" upon recommendation by the Executive Committee. The naming task force recommended that church planters and churches outside

the geographic South could use the "Great Commission" descriptor. ■

### Metropolitan Jonah Forced to Resign

Amidst much controversy, Metropolitan Jonah stepped down as head of the Orthodox Church in America. He tendered his resignation in a letter on July 6, apologizing "for however I have offended you, and for whatever difficulties have arisen from my own inadequacies and mistakes in judgment."

The Religion News Service reported that the OCA synod was forced to oust His Beatitude because he had failed to remove a priest accused of rape. Others complained about Metropolitan Jonah's lack of administrative leadership skills. Some conservative Orthodox commentators fear political foul play in the decision, especially since Metropolitan Jonah had been pushing the OCA to engage in marriage, life, and religious liberty issues. Orthodox investigative blogger George Michalopoulos believes the accusations to be trumped-up charges, backing his case with documentation. ■



RETIRED EPISCOPAL BISHOP George Packard climbs a fence surrounding Manhattan property owned by Trinity Wall Street in a Dec. 17 effort to open the area to Occupy Wall Street protesters. (Photo: Andrew Burton/ENS-Reuters)

### Episcopal Bishop and Priest Arrested for Trespassing in Occupy Protest

A retired Episcopal bishop and a priest from the Episcopal Diocese of New York were both convicted for trespassing during a December 17 Occupy Wall Street protest against Trinity Episcopal Church. The court sentenced four days of community service for George Packard, former Episcopal bishop suffragan for armed services and federal ministries, and the Rev. Earl Kooperkamp of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Harlem. According the Episcopal News Service, both had faced up to 90 days in prison on the most serious charge.

Occupy had been lobbying Trinity for use of the property as an encampment. The movement was suffering from its Nov. 15 eviction from Zuccotti Park. Trinity refused these overtures. They argued that a lack of facilities at the site and a lease agreement precluded encampment. ■



# A Narrow Escape in Pittsburgh

by Alan F. H. Wisdom

Since the 2011 decision to drop the denomination's "fidelity and chastity" standard for ordained officers, conservative evangelical congregations have been lining up to leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Conservative commissioners to this year's General Assembly, June 30–July 7 in Pittsburgh, knew their cause would be weaker than in the past.

"Progressive" commissioners were brimming with confidence. They expected the assembly to take the next step in the normalization of homosexuality by redefining marriage in the PCUSA Book of Order from "a man and a woman" to any "two people." Many progressives also hoped the assembly would take a step forward in pro-Palestinian advocacy by mandating divestment of the denomination's holdings in three companies that supply equipment to the Israeli military.

Committee decisions and early plenary votes raised progressive hopes. But something unexpected happened July 5 and 6. Commissioners pulled back at the last minute from these two actions that would have divided the denomination and strained its relations with other religious bodies. They voted 338–308 against redefining Christian marriage and 333–331 against divestment.

Divestment proponents told stories of Israeli abuses. Elder Commissioner Moufid Khoury from Lehigh Presbytery in Pennsylvania exclaimed: "Occupation is the worst form of terrorism. My own home [in Palestine] was demolished in 1968 by the Caterpillar bulldozers." Young Adult Advisory Delegate Samantha Heinen from North Central Iowa commiserated, "Many of us ... couldn't even imagine sleeping at night knowing that our pension money was coming from such oppression."

The proposed divestment would "be perceived as picking on Israel," noted Minister Commissioner Arthur Shippee from Southern New England. "Where are the loud condemnations of Iran's treatment of the Baha'is?"

Where of the Syrian treatment of the Sunnis? Where of the Saudi treatment of the Shi'ites?" Minister Commissioner Matthew Miller from Prospect Hill Presbytery in Iowa predicted that divestment would "alienate our interfaith Jewish partners."

Minister Commissioner Blake Brinegar from New Covenant Pres-



COMMISSIONERS LINE UP to speak for and against items before the Civil Union and Marriage Issues Committee during open hearings at the 220th Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly. (photo: Michael Whitman/Presbyterian News Service)

bytery in Texas advocated "positive investment" in Palestinian development as a preferred "pathway to peace." A slender majority of commissioners favored Brinegar's approach.

Same-sex marriage proponents complained about ministers being forced to "withhold pastoral care" from same-sex couples wishing to be married. Several ministers announced that they had conducted, or intended to conduct, same-sex weddings regardless of what the church's constitution said.

Minister Commissioner Benjamin Graves from Eastminster Presbytery in Ohio responded, "Part of our pastoral duty is to lift up Scripture and to pastorally say 'no' when the confessions and Scripture and Jesus himself have directed us otherwise." Several delegates cited Jesus' understanding of marriage as the relationship in which the two created sexes "become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5).

Yet Minister Commissioner Bob Melone from Eastern Virginia claimed that "there are no prescriptive words on marriage" in the Bible. Minister

Commissioner Jim Burns from Indian Nations Presbytery in Oklahoma suggested that if same-sex couples "choose to promise to love and faithfully cherish their same-sex partners in marriage till death do they part, I cannot see how this goes against the Spirit of Christ."

Young Adult Delegate Brad Hahn from Western New York voiced pride in his state's recognition of same-sex marriage. "What does it say about us [the PCUSA]," he asked, "that instead of leading we're trying to play catch-up to states like New York?"

Elder Commissioner David Won from the Korean-American Hanmi Presbytery in California countered that the church's role was "changing the norm of the society, not being influenced by the norm of society." Won said that PCUSA moves toward blessing homosexuality had "caused confusions and deep concerns" in Korean churches. A Guatemalan Presbyterian official and a Kenyan-American pastor voiced similar concerns.

Presbyterian World Mission Director Hunter Farrell reported that 35 PCUSA partner churches overseas said any recognition of same-sex marriage "would damage relations." Another six "would be forced to issue public statements against our denomination." Seventeen or eighteen "would have to break relations" if the PCUSA approved same-sex marriage.

A narrow majority at the assembly was not ready to take that fateful step. Evangelical commissioners were relieved but not triumphant. The surprising turn of events "was all God," one commissioner told the *Presbyterian Layman*, "because I'm not that lucky, and I'm not that good."



Alan F. H. Wisdom is an Adjunct Fellow at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.



# Sympathy for the Devil: The U.S. State Department Response to Nigeria's Boko Haram

by Faith J. H. McDonnell

“For Christians in Nigeria to know peace, they must accept Islam as the only true religion.”

This chilling declaration is from Boko Haram, a violent Islamist sect that targets Christians in northern and central Nigeria with the goal of establishing an Islamic state. Boko Haram has killed more than a thousand Christians and destroyed or burned hundreds of churches in recent months. But do they kill on the basis of religion? Not according to the U.S. State Department. In addition to its *jihad* against Christians, Boko Haram is a global threat and could attack the United States, say members of the U.S. Congress. But are they terrorists? Again, the State Department says no.

In June 2012 alone, Boko Haram bombed six churches and massacred over 100 people. A month later, the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayodele Joseph Oritsejafor, testified at a July 10 House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights hearing on U.S. Nigeria policy. Oritsejafor described the horrific attack that had taken place just two days before in Plateau State that was coordinated by Boko Haram. According to a Nigerian Christian watchdog group, Stefanos Foundation, this attack was carried out by more than 200 men with sophisticated weaponry. It left 198 families displaced, 187 houses burned, and 88 people dead, including the Plateau State House Assembly majority leader and Jos North's senator.

Other months have been no better. Following their usual pattern of killing Christians at worship, Boko Haram attacked three churches on Sunday, April 29. They struck Catholic and Protestant services simultaneously at Bayero University in Kano in the morning, and

in the evening a Church of Christ service in Jere, Borno State. A witness at the evening service said that “after their routine shout of *Allah Akbar*,” the assailants headed for the altar and killed Pastor Albert Naga. The three attacks killed 27 and wounded 23. On Easter Sunday Boko Haram terrorist bombings killed 36 churchgoers and damaged multiple churches in Kaduna.

On Easter Monday, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and again in the July 10 House hearing, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Johnnie Carson espoused the Obama Administration's view that “religion does not drive extremism” in northern Nigeria. He portrayed Boko Haram as a victim of poverty and marginalization, causing Subcommittee Chair U.S. Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) to retort, “Frankly, that's an insult to poor people. Poor people don't go around blowing people up.”

Nigeria's Christian President Goodluck Jonathan asked for help in dealing with the Islamists, but the U.S. prefers to address “the underlying political and socio-economic problems in the North.” Carson warned Jonathan, who is already building 400 new Islamic *madrassas* to appease Islamists, that he must respond “to northern grievances.” The State Department warns against any retaliation by Christians. Meanwhile, the U.S. is building a consulate in Kano and earmarking billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars to help Boko Haram feel less marginalized.

Not only does the Administration deny Boko Haram's religious motivation, it refuses to designate the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). U.S. Representatives Peter King (R-NY) and Patrick Meehan (R-PA),

House Homeland Security Committee Chairman and Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence Chairman respectively, urged Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to designate Boko Haram as an FTO. In March, King and Meehan wrote that Boko Haram's “evolution in targeting and tactics closely emulate that of other al Qaeda affiliates that have targeted the U.S. Homeland.” The designation would ensure legal authority for U.S. government investigation and prosecution of Boko Haram and access to every military, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic tools to disrupt and deter Boko Haram's operations, planning, and fundraising. Without the FTO designation, the Departments of Justice and Treasury and the U.S. Intelligence Community cannot act for American national security against Boko Haram.

CAN President Oritsejafor testified that “by refusing to designate Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization” the U.S. was “sending a very clear message” both to the Nigerian government and to the world, “that the murder of innocent Christians and Muslims who reject Islamism ... are acceptable losses.” We American Christians should pray for these suffering brothers and sisters. By urging that our own government defend the persecuted and take responsible action against Boko Haram, we can send the message that this loss is *not* acceptable. 📷



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

# "Render to God" a Total Claim on Christians

by Rick J. Plasterer

**"R**ender to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" is a common expression to say Christians' duty to the state is not absolute. But what should we "render to God," and why?

That was the question considered by Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia in his homily at the concluding mass of the Fortnight for Freedom at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. After a two-week observance from June 21 to July 4 consisting of many prayers, meditations, and special masses, the concluding mass drew an overflowing assembly at noon on July 4.

Archbishop Chaput began his homily by referring to Paul Claudel, a French poet and dramatist of the last century and a devout believer. Surveying western secularization, Claudel observed that the Christian in the secularized West is "a man who knows what he is doing and where he is going" and therefore "alone has liberty in a world of slaves." This transcendent perspective enables the Christian to resist the ideologies of modern states, which are based on materialism and science. These secular philosophies led nations and people who accepted them to the murder of millions of people, while Christians like Claudel continued to stand for truth. They had a duty to "render to Caesar," but also to God.

Archbishop Chaput then asked how Jesus based his admonition to proper duties signaled by the images (of Caesar and God) that believers encounter. If taxes should be paid because money bears the image of the ruler, then human beings, who bear the image of God, should give their entire lives to him. Love of country is honorable, but our real home is not on earth, and we should

give Caesar nothing of ourselves. "Nothing permanent and important belongs to Caesar ...we belong to God and only to God," the Archbishop said. Real freedom is the freedom involved in loving God with our whole being, and this freedom that "knows no attachment other than Jesus Christ," the freedom of the sons of God, isn't something that the government can give or take away. Religious freedom is important because it is needed to facilitate this most basic freedom given by God.

Having shown religious freedom to be the most crucial freedom in the secular order, the archbishop then asked what the task of Christians should be in the contemporary world. Here he referred to the watchman (or sentinel) passage in Ezekiel ("I have appointed you as a sentinel. If I say to the wicked, 'you will surely die' – and you do not warn them or *speak out* to dissuade them ... I will hold you responsible for their blood"). We live in a time that calls for a sentinel, and we are responsible today to defend religious liberty and the dignity of the human person—defending both in words and deeds. Thus we "live as disciples of Jesus Christ..." the archbishop said. He continued: "In coming years, we'll face more and more serious challenges to religious liberty in our country. This is why the Fortnight for Freedom has been so very important."

Prayers and Scripture readings at the mass focused on commitment to God and liberty of conscience of believ-



A ROMAN DENARIUS minted in 44 BC to honor Julius Caesar (Photo credit: CNR.edu)

ers in society as they seek to fulfill God's commands in works of charity. Near the end of the mass, Archbishop William E. Lori, chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, spoke of the new Observatory for Religious Liberty, a

newly established initiative of the Italian government to enable Italian diplomacy to address violations of religious liberty in the world. The Observatory is studying the developing situation with respect to religious liberty in the United States as its first test case. While critics deny that religious liberty is being threatened in the United States, the church is greatly concerned by the denial of liberty of conscience in the HHS mandate. If religious liberty can be threatened in America, it can be threatened anywhere, Archbishop Lori said.

Also presented at the mass was a statement from Pope Benedict XVI concerning the Fortnight for Freedom. The "wisdom and insight of faith" is crucial to building a better society in America, and the American experience of continuous freedom is a gift which "must constantly be won over" to ensure it will continue to be available to advance the good, the Pope said. ☒



Rick Plasterer is a writer for the Institute on Religion & Democracy.





# Former UMC Lobbyist Gets Political at Foundry Church

by Matt Hamilton

Former United Methodist lobbyist Thom White Wolf Fassett preached at prominent Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., on July 1. Called “Generous Redemption: A Journey Beyond Fear,” the sermon was more of a political rally. The best part of the speech was probably the title, which Fassett should get credit for as it does sound rather catchy. After that, though, the speech was pretty much a steady descent downhill.

Judging by the title, one could be forgiven for assuming that the speech would have something to do with God’s redemption. But other than a brief retelling of going from humble beginnings to being a political—excuse me, to being a *religious*—speaker, Fassett curiously left God out of the speech entirely.

As general secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society on Capitol Hill for 12 years, Fassett was the controversial chief political spokesman for the United Methodist Church until 2000.

Fassett talked at length about “the poor and the lost,” pregnant women who need help, convicts in prisons, the homeless, child poverty, malnourished kids in India, LGBTs being ostracized by churches, etc. Then there was his condemnation of Christians who witness such misery and injustices but do nothing and prefer “willful blindness” so that they don’t have to help those in need: “We see the pain and we do nothing about it, we are willfully blind.”

At this point I figured Fassett would say something about what

Christians *should* be doing and tell his audience to volunteer to feed the poor, take care of the children in India, be foster parents, engage in prison ministries, something like that. He didn’t say any of that though. He didn’t challenge his audience to do one single thing.



TOM WHITE WOLF FASSETT led the United Methodist Church’s lobby office on Capitol Hill for 12 years. (Photo: Lake Junaluska Conference & Retreat Center)

Fassett didn’t bother saying anything about how he thinks people should be redeemed, or what role the church has in redemption, or what role God has in redemption. So exactly why “generous redemption” is part of the speech’s title is a bit of a mystery.

For that matter, “the journey beyond fear” from the title also seemed completely disconnected from the content of the speech. Exactly what there was to be afraid of was never really addressed. One statement about fear Fassett did make might was a little bit revealing: “*Freedom from fear will influence who will live in the White House, who adopts humanitarian legislation in the Senate, in the House of Representatives, who rules justly in the Supreme Court.*”

I’m going to go out on a limb and assume that Fassett was not suggesting that conservatives and Republicans should live in the White House, or be in Congress, or rule from the Supreme Court. Previously, when I said that Fassett didn’t challenge his audience to do anything, I suppose I lied. He did insinuate that they should re-elect Obama, that they should elect liberal Democrats to Congress because conservative Republicans aren’t humanitarian, and that they should work to get liberals on the Supreme Court because conservatives can’t rule justly.

Playing to that political theme, Fassett also found the time to stump his support for Obamacare, throw support behind amnesty for illegal immigrants, condemn Israel, blame the Jews for Hamas’ practice of indiscriminately firing rockets against Israeli civilian populations, and mention that the Inuit shouldn’t take rides in oil company helicopters.

All Fassett really advocated for in his speech was political activism. So apparently, “generous redemption” comes from the government, not from God. Given his politicized remarks, Fassett’s call for “forsaking the false prophets of today’s secular altars” was ironic indeed. ■



Matt Hamilton is an intern for the Institute on Religion & Democracy.





# "Queering" the Pentecostals

by Julia Polese

Mainline Protestants in liberal-led denominations are long used to advocacy of GLBT causes. But is this advocacy now entering generally conservative Pentecostalism? Two presentations at the Society of Pentecostal Studies (SPS) gathering at Pat Robertson's Regent University earlier this year may indicate such a trend.

The SPS is an academic organization "dedicated to providing a forum of discussion for all academic disciplines as a spiritual service to the kingdom of God." Started in 1970, the SPS is the oldest academic society in the charismatic movement and was founded principally to serve the mission of the Pentecostal church worldwide. While charismatic denominations like the Assemblies of God and the World Church of God in

Christ are not known for their liberalism, Pentecostalism has birthed its fair share of heresies. The "Oneness" movement—a modalist aberrance that imitates the Sabellians of old by denying the three persons of God in favor of three modes—grew out of charismatic circles. And some charismatics are associated with the "Word of Faith" movement that has birthed many a televangelist. However, the SPS seems to have been established as a means to counteract this tendency in Pentecostalism. Applying rigorous academic study to a movement occasionally plagued by fideism is commendable, especially as it continues to grow exponentially in South America and Africa.

The theme at this year's SPS meeting was "Pentecostalism, Peacemaking, and Social Justice/Righteousness." Papers covered a variety of historical, theological, and philosophical themes unique to the world of Pentecostalism. Two papers in particular, however, seemed a bit out of the ordinary for the Pentecostal movement at large.

In "Queer Tongues Confess, 'I Know, That I Know, That I Know': A Queer Reading of James K.A. Smith's *Thinking In Tongues*," Jared Vazquez of Phillips Theological Seminary argues that the twentieth century hermeneutics of suspicion initiated by Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche and continued by Foucault and Derrida later is the pentecostal (small 'P') hermeneutic. He argues that "queering" theology is natural for charismatics

*While charismatic denominations . . . are not known for their liberalism, Pentecostalism has birthed its fair share of heresies.*

because "queer model or methodology is similar in metaphor to speaking in tongues, phenomenologically, epistemologically, and affectively. If Pentecostals speak in tongues and subvert language, queers embrace embodiment that subverts social norms." He argues that this hermeneutic is natural to the charismatic experience and should be embraced by those seeking to affirm homosexuality in the church.

Another paper that engaged how sexuality is viewed within Pentecostal circles was Queen's University's Pamela M.S. Holmes' "'Can We Find a Way to Address Human Sexuality Without Fighting About It?' One Pentecostal's Response to Brian D. McLaren." Using Nietzsche's preferred genealogical approach to history, Holmes reproduces McLaren's exploration of the discontents of "Greco-Roman narrative with its dualistic frameworks including a distinction between the real and the ideal" regarding sexuality. McLaren betrays himself as a run-of-the-mill progressive, arguing that while God does not

change, the Old Testament records reveal only the Israelite tribe's understanding of him as "a warring and vengeful tribal god . . . who demanded that enemies be wiped out." Only as humanity "matured" could the true, loving nature of God be revealed. Thus, Holmes argues, it falls to us, who presumably are even more mature than the people of the New Testament, to question the "heteronormativity" of our predecessors and, in a Foucaultian fashion,

to reveal and deconstruct the power behind traditional ideas of homosexuality in the church.

Though these approaches may be shocking to the charismatic community, they are not new. The intellectual heritage of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida touches even the Pentecostals. The hermeneutic of suspicion engaged by Vazquez and

Holmes makes the individual skeptic the final authority of what is good. While I might argue that Pentecostalism is epistemologically more responsive to this sort of interpretation with its affirmation of continuing personal revelation in the form of the spiritual gifts, these trends can be seen across the theological board. Progressive hermeneutics could not exist without the development of post-modern interpretations and their myriad discontents. What orthodoxy needs to stem this flow is an understanding of Christian epistemology. It is a charge for members of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and others to form robust responses to these ideas that understand their origin and the roots of their departure from biblical understanding. ■



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# Single Evangelicals and Contraception: An Unholy Compromise

by Kristin L. Rudolph

Should churches advocate contraception for their single members? This question, recently raised at the Q Ideas Conference in Washington, D.C., has launched an intense debate among evangelicals. At the conference, only 34% answered “no” to the question, whereas 66% answered “yes.” This was not the opinion of a fringe liberal group—those at the conference represented a fairly mainstream group from evangelical churches across America.

The poll was conducted at the end of an “Abortion Reduction” panel during which participants discussed startling statistics about extramarital sexual activity and abortion among evangelicals. According to recent statistics reported by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), 80% of unmarried evangelicals between the ages of 18–29 have had sex, and 64% reported having sex in the past year. Unsurprisingly, many are getting pregnant, and tragically, about 30% of those pregnancies end in abortion.

This is a huge problem that demands attention. But the issue goes much deeper than “abortion reduction.” The NAE’s campaign to reduce abortion states: “You may not know it, but abortion is in your church ... and it’s time to start talking about it.” Yes, it certainly is time to talk. But shouldn’t we rewind a bit and talk about why four out of five unmarried evangelicals have had sex, not just what to do about the consequences?

Advocates of this “compromise,” such as Jenell Paris who was featured on the Q panel, blame the failure of the “abstinence only” message. Paris wrote in a *Christianity Today* article that churches should

“[B]oth uphold premarital chastity as the biblical ideal, and encourage and educate unmarried singles about the effective use of contraception ... This may sound like a compromise (it certainly does to me), but consider where years of abstinence absolutism have left us.” Clearly, with more than half of single evangelicals engaging in extramarital sex, the “just say no” approach has failed. But accommodating and even enabling sin is no solution at all.

Teaching that extramarital sex is wrong, but then encouraging the use of contraception if one chooses to do it anyway is dangerously confusing. Such an approach essentially enables sinful actions by making them appear “consequence free.”

The “compromise” approach sets up a false dichotomy, portraying itself as the only alternative to the failed “abstinence only” approach. Evangelicals should move beyond the “just say no” approach, but not by abandoning traditional sexual teachings. Rather, the new approach should strive to portray, in positive terms, why sex is for marriage only. What is so wonderful about the biblical plan for sex, marriage, and children?

At least a contributing factor to this issue is the late marriage age. Avoiding sexual temptation and sin is a poor reason on its own for marriage, but if we truly believe marriage is God’s beautiful plan for the union of man and woman, shouldn’t it be a bit higher on our priority list? The average evangelical couple today gets married in their mid to late twenties, after they have gone to graduate school, traveled, and established a successful career. Our priorities place education,

EVANGELICALS gathered for the Q ideas conference April 10-12 at the historic Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium in Washington, D.C. (photo: Q Ideas)

career, and exploring the world above marriage and family. These pursuits are not inherently bad, but emphasizing their importance over marriage and family relationships seems problematic.

Many argue it’s simply unrealistic in our modern time to expect young people to tie the knot in their early twenties. A myriad of reasons for this supposed impossibility are offered, but the discussion is rarely pursued with any depth. Perhaps, after all, marriage and other life pursuits are not as mutually exclusive as we tend to think. Speaking merely from anecdotal observation, those who marry upon college graduation often have some of the most successful and promising career prospects.

The marriage age issue is only part of a broader discussion that demands evangelicals’ attention. Abortion within the Church is an absolute tragedy that we must solve. But the root issue—the 80% who are unmarried and having sex—show a desperate need for evangelical leaders to teach the true beauty and nature of sex within the marriage relationship, as procreative and unitive—not simply as something we should “just say no” to until the wedding night. ■



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# United Methodists Go Global and Stay Biblical

by Mark D. Tooley

The global 12 million member United Methodist Church, now likely the world's 9th largest communion, is no longer a predominantly liberal U.S. denomination. Its quadrennial governing General Conference, which met for 10 days in Tampa ending May 4, refused to alter the church's official disapproval of homosexual practice.

Unlike the other traditionally liberal-led Main-line denominations, United Methodism is fully global in membership. There are 7.5 million United Methodists in the U.S. and 4.5 million overseas, almost all in Africa, mostly in the Congo. With the U.S. church losing about 100,000 members annually (down from 11 million 44 years ago) and the African church gaining more than 200,000 annually, there likely will be a non-U.S. church majority in 10 years or less.

These statistics frustrate United Methodist liberals who have dominated the denomination for 50 years or more. Homosexuality has been debated at the church's General Conference every four years since 1972. And the church consistently decreed that homosexual practice was "incompatible with Christian teaching." Over the years, the denomination formally prohibited clergy who were actively homosexual (as well as any clergy sexually active outside traditional marriage) and banned same-sex unions. For the last 12 years it has even supported "laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of man and woman."

Liberals always assumed their church would follow American culture on sexual permissiveness. But the church once again rejected any dilution

of its disapproval of homosexual practice, despite a full-court press liberal lobbying campaign. A record 30 percent of delegates came from Africa this time, up from 20 percent just 4 years ago (and 10 percent 8 years ago), and they voted



MEMBERS OF THE AFRICA UNIVERSITY CHOIR sing during an April 29 mission celebration during the 2012 United Methodist General Conference in Tampa, Florida. A record 30 percent of delegates to General Conference represented African countries (Photo: Paul Jeffrey/UMNS)

uniformly against any liberalization of the church's sexual teaching. Combined with many Filipino and European delegates, plus U.S. evangelicals who were themselves about 20 percent of the total, there was a conservative majority on key issues. The final vote on homosexual practice's "incompatibility" with Christian teaching showed 61 percent supported the current stance.

Two prominent, formerly conservative evangelical clergy who now oppose the church's stance offered a seductive substitute that left the church's current disapproval in place while merely acknowledging disagreement within the church. Even this admission was rejected by 53 to 47 percent. After the defeats, pro-gay demonstrators angrily disrupted the conference, as they always do. But remarkably, there were no more votes on petitions about sex. Both sides

agreed the end result was inevitable. It was a historic first across 40 years of debate. And the tabling of sex issues perhaps presages future United Methodist General Conferences.

In 2016, the Africans will likely have about 40 percent of delegates, making any inroads for sexual liberalism almost impossible. More so than ever, the African delegates were organized as a bloc and were effective legislatively. They gained 25 percent of the legislative committee officer seats, previously typically getting none. They also filled two of four open slots on the church's top court, the Judicial Council, with a Congolese pastor and a Harvard Law trained Liberian, as well as electing a Congolese university president to the oversight body for United Methodist seminaries.

When church liberals tried to persuade the General Conference to divest from firms doing business with Israel, Africans overwhelmingly opposed it, defeating divestment by 2 to 1. One Nigerian delegate argued that such anti-Israel measures would only encourage Israel's enemies to seek its destruction. During the General Conference, the Islamist terror group, Boko Haram, attacked several Nigerian churches, killing more than two dozen Christians. Although there are over 400,000 United Methodists in Nigeria, the General Conference was silent.

As at every General Conference for the last 50 years, dozens of far-left political resolutions were passed with little debate. Most United Methodists would be surprised to know their church favors socialized medicine, Global Warming (*con't*)





# I Hate the Culture War Too

by Luke W. Moon

I suspect I am like many of you. I also hate the culture war! I mean, wouldn't it be nice if we could all just live in peace? If we just understood that every idea and action was perfectly acceptable. We wouldn't have to draw lines, give labels, make moral judgments, there would not be any for or against, right or wrong, instead we could all just "be."

As high profile Evangelical Left blogger Rachel Held Evans ranted after Amendment 1 passed in NC,:

*"My generation is sick of the culture wars.*

*"We are tired of fighting, tired of vain efforts to advance the Kingdom through politics and power, tired of drawing lines in the sand, tired of being known for what we are against, not what we are for."*

## Methodists Go Global

*continued from page 12*

regulation, unilateral disarmament, and open borders for the U.S. These utopian stances will disappear into a 1,000-page Book of Resolutions ignored by all except for the denomination's busy Capitol Hill lobby office, which even liberal legislators largely disregard.

Many U.S. delegates left Tampa frustrated by a bureaucratic General Conference that seemed trapped in the status quo. But beneath that veneer was the ongoing empowerment of millions of African United Methodists. They represent surging global Christianity. But they also are salvaging what otherwise would be another dying American Mainline denomination. 📷



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The absurdity of this argument seems to escape people like Rachel Held Evans who seems to have convinced herself that she is somehow holding neutral ground. The fact is there is no neutral space here and none of us live in a world where lines are not drawn, labels applied, or judgments made.

Let me explain what I mean. According to the American Psychological Association, "Since 1975, the American Psychological Association has called on psychologists to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with lesbian, gay, and bisexual orientations."

Back then, very few people, religious or not, would ever have envisioned the President of the United States saying on national television,

*"We are both practicing Christians and obviously this position [that same-sex couples should be able to marry] may be considered to put us at odds with the views of others but, you know, when we think about our faith, the thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it's also the Golden Rule, you know, treat others the way you would want to be treated."*

Between 1975 and today lots of lines have been drawn and crossed. First there was the line of "tolerance," and then came the line of "acceptance," followed by the line of "affirmation," and finally the most recent line, the coercive power of the State compelling all citizens to accept and affirm same-sex marriage.

So if all those lines have been crossed, why should there be any lines at all? How about "age of consent" laws? How about pedophilia? How about polygamy or polyandry? The real issue, which Rachel and others refuse to identify, is not whether we draw lines, but where we draw the lines.

Is it really the lines that are driving young people from church or is it something else? Perhaps younger evangelicals

who are abandoning churches are simply unwilling to accept the limitations that Jesus, the Bible, and the Church all put on sexual gratification. As my colleague Kristin Rudolph noted in a recent blog, "According to recent statistics reported by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), 80% of unmarried evangelicals between the ages of 18 – 29 have had sex" (see page 11).

How many of these young evangelicals are going to be offended when the church says homosexuality is sin, sex before marriage is sin, divorce is sin, and so forth? It should be of no surprise that there might be some anger at the Church when it is the only institution in society saying "no" to people's unrestricted passions and base desires.

Scripture repeatedly assures us that the message of the cross, which in part calls us to self-denial, is both offensive and encouraging. It also reminds us that we are in a battle, not only for ourselves, but for our families, churches, and ultimately the whole world. But as St. Paul admonished, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world" (1 Cor. 10:4). So with God's help, we fight the battle in the realm of ideas, where "arguments and pretensions" hold sway.

Ultimately, I don't fight in the culture war because I love it, but because I am called to it. I hate the culture war against families, against children, against fathers, against stay-at-home moms, against people who hold a high moral standard. What is at stake is not simply personal preferences, it is humanity itself. If that is not worth fighting for then what is? 📷



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# The Colorado Shootings: A Tale of Two Gospels

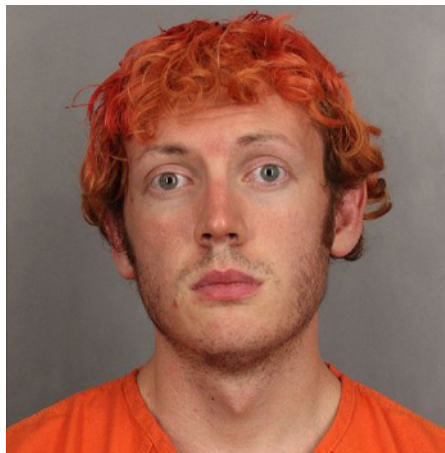
by Barton J. Gingerich

With the terrible news about the movie theater shootings, Americans once again face the tremendous questions regarding God, man, and evil. People ask lots of whys on days like this. In light of such events, Christians instinctively realize they need the church. Pain, wickedness, and suffering lend new dimensions to the phrase “The body of Christ, broken for you.”

Prominent church leaders quickly responded to the crisis. On July 20, 2012, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) issued a statement approved by General Secretary Jim Winkler and Director of Civil and Human Rights Bill Mefford. The document read, “The United Methodist Church considers it a priority public health issue to prevent firearm-related death and injury. In its resolution on ‘Gun Violence,’ the denomination calls for social policies and personal lifestyles that bring an end to senseless gun violence, including a ban on all handguns.” It continued, “Equal to our sadness at this tragic loss of life is our disappointment at Congress’ inability to place public safety above the interests of the National Rifle Assn. Our society can no longer afford to allow the power of the gun lobby in its efforts to ensure ownership without responsibility to keep Congress mute on this pressing public-safety issue.”

According to this epistle, political mobilization is the best way to respond to the shooting. “We believe these simple policies would help lessen the increasing violence associated with the current absence of effective gun regulations,” GBCS posited. “In the face of mounting gun-related killings, it is imperative for Congress to take action.” Thus, launching a crusade against the NRA is the primary response by the UMC lobbying arm.

Winkler and Mefford weren’t the only clergy speaking to the shooting. Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, also commented on July 20, 2012, in his popular blog, “Human beings are capable of unspeakable moral evil. We are shocked by such atrocities, but only because we



SUSPECTED GUNMAN James Holmes was arrested July 20 outside of an Aurora, Colorado theater (photo: Aurora Police Department)

have some distance from the last one. We cannot afford to be shocked when humans commit grotesque moral evil. It tells us the truth about unbridled human sin.”

Mohler pointed to the conscience and institutions like government to help curb human wickedness. More importantly, he argued, “We must admit that there will be no fully satisfying answer to these questions in this life. Christians know that God is sovereign, and that nothing is outside of his control. We also know that he allows evil to exist, and human beings to commit moral atrocities.” He contended, “We cannot deny the sovereignty of God to be denied and evil allowed its independent existence. Nor can we deny the reality of evil and the horror of its threat to be lessened. We are reminded that evil can be answered only by a cross.”

In parting, Mohler instructed, “We must grieve with those who grieve. We must pray for Gospel churches in the Denver area who will be called upon for urgent ministry. We must pray for our nation and communities. And we must pray that God will guard ourselves from evil—especially our own evil. And we must point to the cross. What other answer can we give?”

Here’s an interesting observation: In light of the shootings, Winkler and Mefford turn to partisan politics. Mohler turns to the cross. This is a tale of two gospels at work. One is the Social Gospel, enraptured with the cause of social betterment. In this view, God commissions the church to bring in his kingdom through community organizing and well-crafted legislation. On the other hand is a Salvation Gospel in which the world—human beings—writhe in sin, being hated and hating one another. God in Christ must come down to save men from their sin. Both gospels call for a different kind of love. Some have argued that these two approaches can play well in the sandbox. Nothing dispels that illusion like this summer’s mass shooting in a Colorado movie theater.

The cross or congressional advocacy—how should Christians respond to this situation? For these two groups, the answers differ. Both claim to address the human condition. And people wonder why mainline denominations have become increasingly irrelevant. ■



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# Episcopal Church Faces Consequences of Decline

by Jeffrey H. Walton

Episcopalians meeting for their 77th triennial convention found themselves in a smaller, less affluent and more distanced church from the worldwide Anglican Communion than ever before. Having lost 23 percent of the church's attendance in the last 10 years, deputies to the July 5–12 Indianapolis gathering were forced to make difficult budget decisions while witnessing a mop-up operation by revisionists who largely control the U.S.-based church.

## "Disordering our Boundaries"

A handful of resolutions addressing transgender and homosexual matters passed with more than three quarters of the vote. The categories of "gender identity" and "gender expression" were added to a list of protected items that can no longer disqualify a person from pursuing ordained ministry. The church's nondiscrimination canons were also altered to include the new categories alongside gender, race, and sexual orientation. While the Episcopal Church has only a handful of transgender clergy, the unofficial homosexual and transgender caucus, Integrity USA, made the matter their marquee issue, specially producing a video entitled "Out of the Box" to promote transgender causes at the convention.

The blessing of same-sex unions was adopted by General Convention as a "provisional" rite. Allowed as a "generous pastoral response" to same-sex couples since the 2009 General Convention, the new rite is now a church-wide policy, with a conscience exemption for those dioceses and parishes that do not wish to take part. Church officials were careful not to describe the new rite as marriage, although with an exchange of rings, vows, and a priest's blessing, the two are virtually indistinguishable.

Following the votes, Integrity hosted a Eucharist with partnered homosexual bishops V. Gene Robinson and Mary Glasspool preaching and celebrating with transgender-themed prayers and a transgender deacon led the Gospel procession.

"Spirit of Life, we thank you for disordering our boundaries and releasing our desires as we prepare this feast of delight," one prayer began. "Draw us out of hidden places and centers of conformity to feel your laughter and live in your pleasure."



OUTGOING EPISCOPAL BISHOP of New Hampshire V. Gene Robinson preached at a special communion service led by the church's LGBT caucus on the day transgender policies were passed at General Convention. (Photo: Sharon Sheridan/ENS)

A dozen traditionalist bishops released a statement dissenting from the actions of the church after the rite was passed. "We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that God's vision for sexual intimacy is that it be exercised only within the context of marriage between a man and a woman," the "Indianapolis Statement" read in part.

The dissenting bishops identified the new liturgy as being "for all practical purposes same-sex marriage."

"We believe that the rite subverts the teaching of the Book of Common Prayer, places The Episcopal Church outside the mainstream of Christian faith and practice, and creates further distance between this Church and the Anglican Communion along with other Christian churches," the twelve bishops wrote.

The worldwide Anglican Communion has repeatedly asked the Episcopal Church not to proceed with same-sex blessing rites.

## Budget Battle

Perhaps the biggest surprise of General Convention was legislation passing the House of Deputies calling for the sale of

the denomination's Manhattan headquarters. While the House of Bishops ultimately shot down a forced sale—instead merely beginning an investigation into moving the church's headquarters elsewhere—the strong support by clergy and laity deputies to offload the Episcopal Church Center was a jolt to the convention. The Episcopal Church is currently servicing \$37 million in debt on the structure, which is projected to cost \$11 million to operate over the next three years. Other mainline churches have relocated their headquarters to less expensive and more centrally located cities.

Deputies also voted to cut the church's communications budget, including a 45 percent reduction to the Episcopal News Service. Less financial assistance will be sent to the Anglican Communion Office, with the church now giving only 30 percent of what has been asked.

## Bright Spots

The cloud that was 77th General Convention was not without a silver lining, however. Anti-Israel resolutions calling for divestment from companies that do business with the Israeli military were easily deflected in favor legislation calling for "positive investment" in the Palestinian economy.

Traditionalists saw an effort to chastise conservative bishops essentially rejected. Bishops of the "renewing" Episcopal dioceses of Fort Worth and Quincy had sought to discipline nine traditionalist bishops who signed on to court statements arguing that the church was not hierarchical above the diocesan level. A disciplinary investigation against the bishops of Dallas, Springfield, Albany, Central Florida, and Western Louisiana will probably go nowhere. ■



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# IRD Diary: A Summer with IRD

by Christian Stempert

When I applied for this summer internship, which is now drawing to a close, I was under the impression that the IRD served as a public policy advocacy and education group within the Christian community. This misconception was quickly corrected in one e-mail, and I was informed that the IRD instead focuses on the church's social witness and renewed dedication to traditional Christian teachings.

Having been brought up in a conservative Christian home, church, and school, and now attending a conservative Christian college, this intrigued me. While the focus was out of my normal areas of interest—politics and economics—the connection between the Christian church, theology, and public witness was something that I was eager to explore. The downside, however, was since I had always been in a conservative environment, I came into the summer completely ignorant of the other side of the spectrum.

So, on my first day, I was directed to the Christian Left's Facebook page and other liberal Christian websites and organizations. I quickly discovered that liberal Christians are still dedicated to the same thing they have been since the early 20th century: a progressive Social Gospel.

Liberal Christians, in emergent, evangelical, and mainline circles, are dedicated to a message and culture of social justice, equality, fairness, and inclusion—based on the overarching principle and example of Christ's love. This is the drive behind the Christian Left's efforts on behalf of immigration reform, same-sex marriage, and greater economic equality, among other "social justice" causes.

For them, the Church's main concern, in conjunction with Micah 6:8, is to "act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." They draw the definition of "justice" from Matthew 25:40, where Christ says, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did unto one of the least of these... you did unto me." They reference Christ's love and compassion for the tax collectors, lepers, and other social outcasts as a call for Christians to embrace those around us

## One of the local pastors preached a message rejecting the Great Commission.

who are being "rejected" and "persecuted" by society.

But, lest you get the wrong picture, this is not an exclusively liberal doctrine. Conservative churches do not ignore these passages of Scripture. They do, however, have a slightly different understanding of them. Both sides of the political aisle within the Christian community work toward and advocate for "social justice"—there are just conflicting visions of what brings that about.

The IRD's founding document summarizes the historical Christian view of the Church's role in politics, which conservatives continue to affirm: "the first political task of the Church is to be the Church." That is to say, the Church's main role is to be a witness to the world of God's saving grace and love, and to preach first and foremost the Gospel of Salvation.

In Mark 8:36, Jesus says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" Our first concern must be

for the eternal well-being of the people of this world. There is a time and place for political activism, but our priority must be the Gospel of Salvation, not the Social Gospel of material equality and "fairness."

Sadly, this primary mission of the church is being deserted by many U.S. Christians. In July, I attended the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.'s 220th General Assembly in Pittsburgh. On that Sunday, one of the local pastors preached a message rejecting the Great Commission. "At this point," said the Rev. Dr. Randall Bush of East Liberty Presbyterian Church, "the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached to all corners of the world, so knock it off."

Not only is this approach to the Christian Gospel unbiblical, but it is also tragically counterproductive. The only way to achieve a just society in this sinful world is through the spread of the Gospel. True change comes through a transformation of the hearts and minds of people, and that can only happen through faith in Christ.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work for the IRD this summer because they are aware of the crisis that the American Church is currently facing. It is through the Christian church that our society will be reformed and improved, but that can only happen through the renewal of our church and our faith. That is the IRD's mission, an effort I am honored to have contributed to.



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