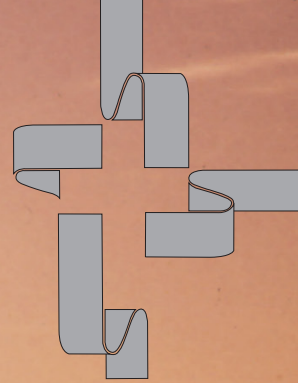


faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

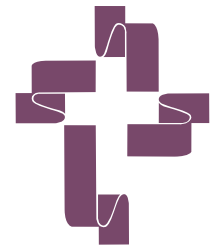
Winter 2012



A New Dawn for Ecumenical Leadership

ALSO INSIDE:

- ▶ **How Churchgoers Voted**
- ▶ **Merkel: Christianity 'World's Most Persecuted Faith'**
- ▶ **'Biblical Womanhood' Is Not 'Woman's Work'**



Features

6 How Churchgoers Voted by Mark D. Tooley

Whatever the reasons for Mitt Romney's defeat and Barack Obama's victory, it cannot be faulted on traditional religious voters, who seem to have voted in force.



15 'Biblical Womanhood' Is Not 'Women's Work' by Kristin L. Rudolph

Rachel Held Evans claims she is setting out to follow all of the Bible's instructions for women as literally as possible for a year.



Programs

Religious Liberty

- 7 A History of the International Day of Prayer
for the Persecuted Church Faith J. H. McDonnell

Anglican Action

- 10 Episcopal Bishops Argue for Same-Sex Marriage Jeffrey H. Walton

Presbyterian

- 11 The Presbyterian Church (USA) and Israel Alan F. H. Wisdom

UMAction

- 12 Lake Junaluska Conference Fuels Anti-Israel
and Anti-American Bias Barton J. Gingerich

Articles

- 8 Leading Ecumenically Mark D. Tooley
13 Angela Merkel Calls Christianity 'World's Most
Persecuted Faith' Andrew E. Harrod
14 The Journey Toward a Realigned Protestantism Robert Benne
16 IRD Diary: Confessions of a Former 'None' Nathaniel D. Torrey

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Above, left: A cross-section of Christian leadership attended the Ecumenical Leadership Summit in Dallas, Texas. (Photo: IRD)

Ecumenically Gathering for Renewal

Recently I attended an Ecumenical Leadership Summit in Dallas. With renewal leaders from Lutheranism, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and United Methodism, we hashed out a common witness for orthodox Protestantism in today's America. Many of these leaders have left their old denominations and created new theologically traditional structures. Fortunately, we United Methodists have not faced that struggle.

A wonderful spirit of common purpose and hopefulness about the future infused this gathering. One of the leading speakers was Irish Methodist theologian William Abraham of United Methodist Perkins School of Theology at nearby Southern Methodist University. He urged a vision of "renewal rooted in optimism" that is "driven by a positive vision of Christian faith." He noted that United Methodism is no longer "mainline," which too often has meant anti-American and anti-capitalist along with other political labels rather than a focus on the Gospel. "We are now a global church," he rejoiced. "Let's rename who we are."

Abraham warned that modern evangelicalism is "extremely unstable." He also lamented the "celebration of raw sensuality" in modern Western culture. "We need to be clear on the core vision of marriage as given by our Lord and Savior," he said. Abraham also cited the "development of aggressive secularism" that knows that the "best way to shut people down is to control how they speak."

Bemusedly calling the New Atheists "aggressive ignoramus-es," Abraham warned they are "infiltrating deeply into universities." And he urged, "We must absolutely engage the deep assault on Christian faith." Citing Protestant demographic decline, Abraham noted that theologian Stanley Hauerwas claims God is "killing" Protestantism. Disagreeing with the Duke University professor, Abraham smilingly asserted that Hauerwas is not a prophet but just a "noisy Texan."

Abraham also spoke of the "challenge of Islam" and asked whether "mainstream Islam can distinguish between politics and religion." He hailed America as a "theological experiment" whose "vibrant civil religion" is a "brilliant solution" for integrating faith with public life.

Recalling that United Methodism, like much of Mainline Protestantism, was "hijacked by remnant reconstructionist Protestants," Abraham described leaders of official church structures who operate as "functional atheists." He also recalled that Methodism "gave away" its universities in the nineteenth century

and its seminaries in the twentieth century. Historically, Methodism has been at its best evangelistically when it was at its best theologically, as in the mid-nineteenth century. Official Methodism's rejection of revivalism was a "big mistake," he regretted. He remembered once being warned not to be "too Christological" in a sermon at his school's chapel. "We need a recovery of nerve that we lost in late nineteenth century," Abraham urged.

The church must recover the practice of catechesis and transmitting the faith to the next generation, Abraham insisted. He also urged recovering a "rich, robust account of evil and the demonic." Hopeful about the church's future, he celebrated that today is a

time of "fertile" possibility for the church and an "occasion to find our voice and have fun."

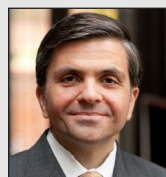
As part of that "fun," the Ecumenical Leadership Summit released a declaration called "Jesus Christ: Our Common Ground and Common Cause" (see pages 8 and 9). I helped craft the statement's counsel on the Church's "Social Witness," which we agreed should prioritize "protecting human life at all stages; addressing the needs and expanding the opportunities of the poor; strengthening the marriage

of man and woman and the bonds between parents and children as the necessary building blocks of society; and defending the free exercise of religion in North America and around the world."

We pray this declaration will encourage believers from Mainline Protestant traditions, whether still in old structures or developing new ones, to uphold biblical faith winsomely and effectively amid adversity.

Across 31 years IRD has battled for a faithful social witness by America's churches. We've won some battles and lost a few, but we realize now more than ever that in this world nothing is constant but God's love. We are grateful to you for sustaining IRD as we prepare for tomorrow's struggles. ☒

Mark Tooley



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

International Briefs

Former 'Wife' of LRA Leader Joseph Kony Escapes

Earlier this year Invisible Children highlighted a story about the escape of a teenage former "wife" of Joseph Kony. Kony is the leader of the militant Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has abducted more than 30,000 children in Central Africa since the 1980s to serve as soldiers and "wives." As the LRA has dwindled to about 300 combatants, it pillages villages, kidnapping children to bolster its army.

In an interview with IC staff, the former captive said she gathered the courage to escape when she saw a flier with "the pictures of people who had escaped. It was then the idea came to my mind, 'I will try to escape.'" Despite enduring brutal beatings resulting from a previous failed escape attempt, the young woman successfully freed herself from three years of captivity. She explained how she was not alone, as there were about forty other "wives" with her. 📖

Islamists Ban 'The Music of Satan' in Northern Mali

The encroachment of Shariah law in the West African nation of Mali threatens to squelch its rich music culture. Mali is yet another African country falling under the tyranny of Islamist rule in the wake of the "Arab Spring." Three armed Islamic groups now control the northern Malian

cities of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao; these groups have put the cities under the heavy burden of Shariah. All Western music was officially banned in northern Mali in a decree issued on August 22. The decree referred to such music as "the music of Satan," and informed the Malian people that "Qur'anic verses must take its place."

One Malian musician told the *Guardian*: "There's a lack of joy. No one is dancing. There are no parties. Everybody's under this kind of spell. It's strange." But some artists are resisting the Islamists by taking an annual Timbuktu-based music festival on the road, as they are now musicians "in exile." 📖

Bishops Dream of Freedom for Sudan and South Sudan

The Church of England's Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, is one of few Christian voices speaking out for those oppressed by harsh Islamist regimes. Sentamu himself was a Ugandan refugee. On October 17 he delivered a speech to Britain's House of Lords defending the South Sudanese who face oppression from Khartoum, despite winning their independence last year from the violent Islamist regime. He reported the concerns of 14 Catholic and Anglican bishops who, citing Martin Luther King, Jr., declared at a May retreat that they "too have a dream" about "two nations which are democratic

and free, where people of all religions, all ethnic groups, all cultures and all languages enjoy equal human rights based on citizenship," and where Christians and Muslims "can attend church or mosque freely without fear."

Sentamu told the House of Lords: "The fact is that the needs and aspirations of these noble people are not actually understood in the West," and most western Christians do not speak out in defense of their brothers and sisters facing persecution in Sudan and South Sudan. Nevertheless, Sentamu concluded: "I call upon Her Majesty's Government to do all in their power to assist both countries in making this dream [of the bishops] a reality." 📖

American and European Views on Religious Freedom Differ

Panelists at an October 11th conference sponsored by the Religious Freedom Project of the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs discussed how American religious freedom tends to be understood as protecting the integrity of religions, whereas Europeans see religious freedom as balanced by the state against other interests. Dean Carolyn Evans of Melbourne Law School noted that Americans tend to view the state as a threat to liberty, and believe civil liberties exist to protect individuals from the state. In contrast, Europeans favor a more active role for the government to advance liberty, and think of religious liberty concerns as a matter of "balancing of rights."

In early 2012 the United States Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the "Ministerial Exception," which exempts clergymen and teachers of religious doctrine from antidiscrimination law, is grounded in the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the first amendment. In contrast, the European Court of Human Rights recently denied a Christian organization the right to fire an employee who had a child out of wedlock. 📖



THE NATIONAL FLAG OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALI, a landlocked country in West Africa. In 2012 Islamist militants took advantage of a rebel movement to seize control in the northern region of the country of 14.5 million souls. At one time Mali was considered one of Africa's most promising democracies.

Church News

NCC Braces for 'Ecumenical Winter'

The National Council of Churches Governing Board met in mid-November at the Washington, D.C., United Methodist Building to discuss restructuring, finances, and future prospects. The venerable ecumenical body has fallen on economic hard times lately; financial strains leave the NCC's future unsure. An ashen-faced president Kathryn Lohre confessed, "Are we in an ecumenical winter or ecumenical spring? ... We're clearly in the ecumenical winter."

The board explored the new NCC workflow model. Transitional General Secretary Peg Birk instructed, "It's an experiment. It doesn't mean we've given up or won't move forward."

In conclusion, Birk stated, "It's not about the money. It's about the NCC living into its call to visible unity. ..." The apparent pessimism nevertheless indicates that matters are not all well in the world of federal ecumenism. Representatives took a break from business to petition Congressional leaders to support entitlement programs during their lame duck session. ☒

Evangelical Group Calls for Immigration Reform

Officials from 10 evangelical organizations are calling upon President Obama, as well as Senate and House leaders, to pursue immigration reform within the first days of the new administration. In a conference call on November 13, the group, known as the Evangelical Immigration Table, outlined six points in their immigration platform, including increased border security. A legal pathway to citizenship for those who have entered or remain in the country illegally was identified as the chief goal, with the other points acknowledged as necessary conditions.

The group includes officials from the National Latino Evangelical Coalition,

the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), and Sojourners. Leith Anderson, president of the NAE, claimed the group's efforts represent "tens of millions" of evangelicals, and that "there has been pushback, but less" than expected. ☒

Baptist Theologian Says Church Fails to Prepare Christians for Leadership

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has written a new book called *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership that Matters*. In a November interview with Desiring God Ministries, he said the Church has largely failed in preparing Christians for leadership in the secular world, often because they "don't know what to do with the world of business." God has given Christians "a stewardship and a responsibility," in our jobs outside the Church, Mohler said.

Christians should think about "Leadership in terms of conviction that is shared by others, and then leads to the right corporate action." Further, he said, "Convictions aren't merely the things we believe, they're the beliefs that possess you, that define your life." Mohler explained how the Christian leader gains

conviction and confidence not through self-assurance but by knowing the "God of all truth, the God who revealed truth in Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life." ☒

EMEU Conference Undermines Support for Israel

On November 8–9, Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU) held a "24-Hour Middle East Leadership Briefing" at a Wheaton College center named after evangelist Billy Graham, who has urged Christians to base their vote on supporting Israel. The conference was held at the Billy Graham Center, but sponsored by Wheaton College's Biblical and Theological Studies department.

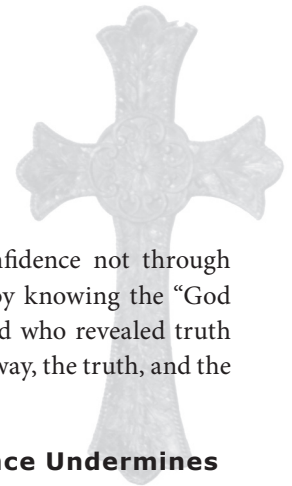
EMEU consistently undermines support for Israel, and in October 2012 they received thanks from a Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organization for writing a letter urging Congress to reconsider military aid to Israel. One of the speakers at the event was Wheaton College professor Dr. Gary Burge, who wrote a book entitled *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians*. Another speaker was Dr. Mark Braverman who wrote *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land* and whose website links to the official Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against Israel. ☒

IRD Launches New Program to Engage Evangelicals

Scripture reminds us that we are called to spread the Gospel and keep each other accountable. Over our 31 years of existence, the IRD has advocated accountability within the Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations.

We are proud to announce the launch of an Evangelical program that will focus on biblical accountability and developing partnerships with our brothers and sisters! However, no great undertaking is accomplished without a community supporting the work.

Donate to IRD today to ensure our program is equipped to effectively engage the Evangelical community. ☒





TRADITIONAL BELIEVERS did their part for 2012 Republican candidate Mitt Romney, at levels comparable to 2004. (Photo: NPR)

How Churchgoers Voted

by Mark D. Tooley

Whatever the reasons for Mitt Romney's defeat and Barack Obama's victory, it cannot be faulted on traditional religious voters, who seem to have voted in force.

As predicted in pre-election polls, traditional Catholics and evangelicals seemingly repeated their 2004 high water of support for the Republican presidential nominee. Exit polls showed that white evangelicals—26 percent of total voters—rehashed their 2004 level of support for George W. Bush, supporting Romney by 79 percent to 21 percent. In 2004 white evangelicals were 23 percent of the electorate, sparking fears of impending theocracy by some on the Left.

Exit polling revealed Protestants and other non-Catholic Christians, at 53 percent of the electorate, voted 42 percent for Obama and 57 percent for Romney. A poll more strictly confined to Protestants shows they favored Romney 62 to 37 percent. White Protestant and other Christians—comprising 39 percent of the total—favored Romney 69 to 30 percent. Weekly Protestant church attenders favored Romney 70 percent to 29 percent. The exit poll showed Catholics, who were 25 percent of the electorate, voting 50 percent for Obama and 48 percent for Romney. But weekly-mass-attending Catholics supported Romney by 57 to 42

percent. And white Catholics, comprising 18 percent of the total, supported Romney by 59 to 40 percent, a greater percentage than their 2004 support for Bush. Weekly church goers of all churches, who comprised 42 percent of the electorate, supported Romney by 59 to 39 percent.

By contrast, more occasional church attenders—40 percent of voters—supported Obama by 55 to 43 percent. Those who never attend—comprising 17 percent—supported him by 62 to 34 percent. The 12 percent who report no religious affiliation supported Obama by 70 percent to 26 percent.

Among the activists organizing evangelical voters for Romney this year was former Christian Coalition chief Ralph Reed, who now heads the Faith and Freedom Coalition. They report in their own poll that evangelical support for Romney over McCain increased by 10 percent. They also cite a “swing of 35% in the direction of the GOP” among Catholic weekly church attenders. “Virtually the entire increase in Mitt Romney's vote compared to John McCain's in 2008 came because of higher turnout and higher support from evangelical voters,” their pollster surmises.

Reed himself, who convened a post-election D.C. press conference, was more sweeping. “Evangelicals and faithful Catholics turned out in large numbers and voted

overwhelmingly for religious liberty, the sanctity of life and marriage, and limited government.” But he regretted: “Younger voters and minorities turned out in even larger numbers [than] in 2008 and delivered Obama to victory.” Searching for good news, he said many of the young people and minority groups like Hispanics who ensured Obama's victory are “people of faith” who might respond to conservative appeals.

Some on the Left celebrate that white evangelicals and traditional Catholics were insufficient to deliver victory for Republicans. But evangelical voters increased as a percentage of the electorate. And weekly mass attending Catholics, at 11 percent of voters, remained at the same percentage even as total Catholics were somewhat reduced from 2004.

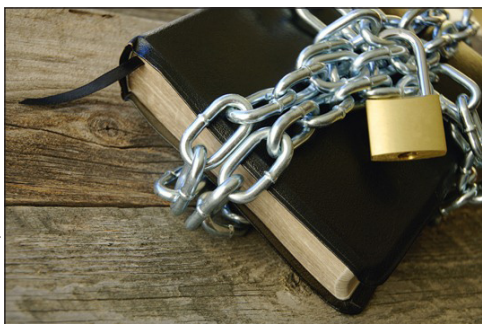
Despite claims that America is becoming more secular, the 2012 exit poll shows the same number of American voters attending church weekly or more as 42 percent. Non-church attenders have increased almost negligibly from 15 to 17 percent.

Even in an American electorate that remains overwhelmingly religious—only 12 percent disclaim any religious affiliation—Obama was able to win by cobbling together the unreligious, Catholics and Protestants less likely to attend church, and overwhelming majorities of Hispanic Catholics and black Protestants. Unlike in 2008, there seems to have been little Obama effort to target evangelicals.

The reputed “God Gap” between Republicans and Democrats that was highlighted especially in 2004 continues unabated. Democrats get majorities of strongly religious voters only among ethnic minority groups. But religion will remain important to both parties so long as overwhelming majorities of American voters still profess it. ■



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



A History of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

by Faith J. H. McDonnell

The second weekend of November was especially significant this year: The 237th birthday of the United States Marine Corps, Veteran's Day, and an annual day of supplications. November 11 marked the annual observance of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), which met for its sixteenth anniversary to remember those persecuted for their faith around the world.

I was privileged to be part of the coalition that created IDOP, convicted by the realization that more people had died for their Christian faith in the twentieth century than in all the previous centuries combined. On January 23, 1996, Nina Shea, the director of the Center for Religious Freedom (now at The Hudson Institute) convened our first meeting. The group consisted of many Christian organizations, including IRD, along with tireless advocates like Michael Horowitz and the late Chuck Colson. On that day, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a "Statement of Conscience and Call to Action" wherein it pledged to end "our own silence in the face of the suffering of all those persecuted for their religious faith."

Afterward a smaller team met regularly to plan the first International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Diane Knippers, late president of IRD, was the Day of Prayer's liaison to the mainline denominations. (We also reported to those church members whose denominational leaders, along with the NCC, refused to endorse the observance, protesting that we should "not just pray for Christians.") I created resource materials

and helped to draft a resolution on the worldwide persecution of Christians that Congress passed in September 1996.

Elsewhere our coalition worked to encourage churches—not just in the United States, but all over the world—to commit to participating in the first

Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), for the first time, enshrining religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy.

This year's IDOP—as promoted by the World Evangelical Alliance for November 4—focused on praying for the persecuted Christians of Iran. When

we first began to meet in 1996, the martyrdom of some of Iran's top Christian leaders, including Pastor Mehdi Dibaj and Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr, weighed heavily on our hearts and minds. Today, there have been amazing answers to prayer in the release from prison earlier this year of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, and earlier Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirzadeh Esmaeilabad in 2009. So many others are still in prison, and the repressive climate for religious freedom is

as life threatening as ever. And that's just Iran.

If your church has not made plans to pray for the persecuted, encourage your pastor to set aside an upcoming Sunday for this important issue. IRD has many resources available, including special litanies for the persecuted church.

Take as your motto Hebrews 13:3: "Remember those in prison, as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." 📖

**"Remember those...
who are mistreated
as if you yourselves
were suffering."
—Hebrews 13:3**

IDOP, planned for September 29, 1996. By early September, persons in 110 countries had signified that they would be actively taking part in the Day of Prayer. Listed among the 110 countries were Sudan, China, and Iran. One of the most powerful, and quite humbling, aspects of IDOP is knowing that Christians who are themselves experiencing the greatest persecution are still looking beyond their own circumstances to pray for others who are persecuted! Another highlight for me, as an Anglican, is that the very first formal resolution of the newly created American Anglican Council was a statement endorsing IDOP. The bishops of the American Anglican Council sent a pastoral letter to the entire Episcopal Church commending observation of the day.

In 1998, IDOP began as the United States Congress passed the International



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

Leading Ecumenically

by Mark D. Tooley

On October 22–25, leaders from Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches and organizations affirmed common theological ground and sought practical ways of working together during a recent conference in Dallas, Texas. In their statement, titled “Jesus Christ: Our Common Ground and Common Cause,” the leaders said, “Even as we fully acknowledge the imperfections of Christian institutions and the broken nature of our collective witness to the world, we commit to strive together for a faithful way of being the Church together. Our hearts are burdened for the millions of our neighbors who are estranged from God and the Church.”

Attendees formed working groups and listened to plenary sessions on ecumenical relations and theological education, engaging North American culture, church planting and mission as well as social witness during the four-day meeting. On the summit’s final day, participants affirmed an ecumenical statement that addresses each of these subjects. They also committed to meet again for a second summit in 2013. While each of the participants endorsed the statement they were not necessarily representing their respective churches/organizations. The group of 32 included leaders from:

- North American Lutheran Church
- The Presbyterian Lay Committee
- Presbyterian Church in America
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church
- ECO: a Covenanted Order of Evangelical Presbyterians
- The Institute on Religion and Democracy
- Good News (United Methodists)
- American Anglican Council
- Anglican Church in North America

The following statement articulates the group’s resolve:*

As 21st century Christians, we are both heirs of the faith once delivered to the saints and living witnesses to the transforming power of Jesus Christ for life. Called together from diverse streams of the Christian tradition, we acknowledge the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace that exist among those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone for salvation. Even as we fully acknowledge the imperfections of Christian institutions and the broken nature of our collective witness to the world, we commit to strive together for a faithful way of being the Church together. Our hearts are burdened for the millions of our neighbors who are estranged from God and the Church.

* The above statement is an abridged version. The complete document is available online at <http://www.americananglican.org/christian-leaders-cross-denominational-lines>.

As leaders in the Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Reformed traditions, we hold in common the historic faith of the Church, around which we come together...

Engaging Culture

Recognizing a climate increasingly hostile to the living out of a faithful Christian witness, due to trends which include pervasive secularism, changing ethical norms, the challenge of effectively proclaiming the Gospel in a pluralistic context, and the vacuum created by the decline of Protestantism:

- 1) We proclaim and defend the faith that uplifts Jesus Christ as the Way, and the Truth, and the Life and confronts the ethical and theological relativism of our day.
- 2) We earnestly pray that all believers will deepen their commitment to the historic Christian faith, engage world-views intolerant of Christianity with insight and compassion, and reassert the Gospel’s influence throughout society.
- 3) We desire to see all persons transformed by the Gospel, equipped through discipleship, and accepting personal responsibility for the fulfillment of Christ’s Great Commission. Relational evangelism through person-to-person discipleship is the mission.
- 4) We sincerely and humbly seek to fulfill our Lord’s desire expressed in John 17:21: That we become one, “that the world may believe.” To that end, we invite our congregations to find ways to express that unity through church planting, missions, and social witness together.

Church Planting and Missions

We are on common ground in obeying the Great Commission in reaching people for Jesus Christ through the salvation of souls both at home and abroad. We covenant together to communicate, cooperate, and collaborate in living out our missional identity as disciples of Jesus Christ. We will look for ways, as God blesses and matures our relationships, to make authentic disciples who have a heart for following Jesus into the world. Therefore, we will explore together cooperatively planting churches and sending missionaries through:

- 1) Sharing training opportunities
- 2) Sharing information and resources, including the use of web-based technologies
- 3) Engaging in joint ministries and offering incubator facilities to support new church plants
- 4) Providing theological education, including remote theological education domestically and globally



A cross-section of Christian leadership gathered in early fall to discuss an ecumenical way forward. (Photo: IRD)

- 5) Identifying locations where we can encourage catalytic leadership toward collaborative church plants
- 6) Sharing space with dislocated congregations

Social Witness

We are grateful recipients of scriptural teaching and heirs of great Christian traditions that insist that following Christ means loving our neighbors and taking responsibility to advance their wellbeing. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, instructed His exiled people to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). The primary social witness of the Church is in our proclamation of the Gospel in word and sacrament, challenging the sins and idolatries that hold so many captive and building worshiping communities that demonstrate God’s kingdom. We are called to act with justice and charity toward others within and outside our churches. The Church also serves society through the Christian formation of laypersons who exercise their religiously based moral convictions as citizens, political leaders, and participants in voluntary associations.

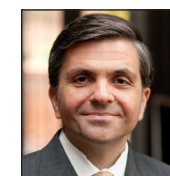
We share the biblical understanding of government as “God’s servant for [our] good,” appointed to encourage righteousness and restrain evil (Romans 13:1–7). Further, we affirm that the Church at times needs to address government and act publicly in matters related to society and its governance. We wish to do so in ways that evince humility, respect for biblical authority, careful study, reasoned judgment, and consistency between our words

and actions. In our view, the Church should speak only on the issues that follow directly from core Christian moral convictions. These include:

- 1) Upholding the dignity of each human person as created in God’s image
- 2) Protecting human life at all stages
- 3) Addressing the needs and expanding the opportunities of the poor
- 4) Strengthening the marriage of man and woman and the bonds between parents and children as the necessary building blocks of society
- 5) Defending the free exercise of religion in North America and around the world

We commit ourselves anew to Christ and to one another. We recognize that the Holy Spirit has called us together, and that only through the Spirit can we hope to accomplish what we have set forth today.

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20–21) 📖



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

Episcopal Bishops Argue for Same-Sex Marriage

by Jeffrey H. Walton

Much like their counterparts in North Carolina earlier this year, Roman Catholic and Episcopal Church bishops in Maine, Minnesota, Maryland, and Washington State faced off on opposite sides of marriage ballot measures this autumn. The marriage campaigning came at the same time several dioceses began authorizing their parishes to begin blessing same-sex unions, using a new “provisional” rite authorized at the recent Episcopal General Convention.

In Maryland, Maine, and Washington, voters approved referendums legalizing same-sex marriage in those states. Minnesota voters rejected an amendment to the state constitution that would define marriage as between one man and one woman.

Washington State

Enacting same-sex marriage is “a conservative proposal” consistent with basic Christian teaching and the Christian life, Episcopal Bishop Greg Rickel argued in a statement released at a September news conference in support of Referendum 74 held at a Seattle Episcopal parish.

Rickel, whose Olympia diocese encompasses Western Washington, has supported same-sex blessings within his denomination, having voted at General Convention in July to approve the “provisional” rite for same-sex couples.

“I am for it,” Rickel endorsed in his statement about the same-sex marriage referendum. “I hope we will finally make way for this to happen, not only in our society, but also in our church.”

Maryland

Maryland Episcopal Bishop Eugene Taylor Sutton in an October pastoral letter wrote that the church has “expanded the purpose of marriage to include the mutual joy and love of the couple and not just for procreation.”

“Clearly our view of marriage has evolved over thousands of years since the time when women were considered property and men could ‘own’ as many of them as he could afford either as wives or



IN SOME STATES, Christian voters had one more issue to consider during the national election: same-sex marriage. (Photo: Mental Floss)

slaves for their enjoyment,” Sutton wrote. “There are fewer than a handful of Bible verses used by those opposed to same-sex relationships, and none spoken by Jesus.”

While the Maryland bishop stated that “sexual expression is to be celebrated in the context of marriage,” he wrote that Jesus Christ “practiced a radical inclusion of those who are the ‘other.’”

Minnesota

The religious divide was most visible in Minnesota, where openly partnered homosexual Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire faced off with National Organization for Marriage President Brian Brown in a live debate aired on Minnesota Public Radio.

The Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota voted last year in favor of a resolution opposing amending the state constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman.

Same-Sex Blessings Authorized

Among parishes to recently announce that they will conduct same-sex union blessing ceremonies is a historic Episcopal

church that counts President George Washington and Confederate General Robert E. Lee among its past congregants.

Rector Pierce Klemmt of Christ Church in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia revealed in an October letter to his congregation that Virginia Bishop Shannon Johnston has granted the parish’s request to begin using the blessing rite for same-sex couples.

“With great joy I share that Bishop Johnston has approved our request to perform same-gender blessings,” Klemmt wrote. “In his letter to us, the bishop said: ‘The support from such an iconic place as Christ Church will be very helpful indeed for the witness of our Diocese in this matter of pastoral care for all of our people...I look forward to working with you for LGBT inclusion in every way that I can.’ More information will be forthcoming as we prepare to perform same-gender blessings.”

Virginia recognizes marriage as between one man and one woman. The blessings, despite using a modification of the church’s marriage rite, will not be called marriage.

Christ Church has a storied past. Designed in the mid-18th century by the same architect of the historic Falls Church, both buildings were part of Truro parish, of which Washington was a vestryman. Lee was a member of Christ Church from an early age; a silver plaque on the chancel rail marks the spot where he was confirmed.

According to denominational statistics, Christ Church has lost more than one quarter of its Sunday attendance in the past 10 years, from over 800 attendees in 2001 down to less than 600 in 2011. ■



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The Presbyterian Church (USA) and Israel

by Alan F. H. Wisdom

The position of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) regarding Israel is not determined by the denomination's theology, but rather common values. The PCUSA holds to a Reformed theology that emphasizes continuities between God's covenant with ancient Israel and God's covenant with the Church. The status of the Jewish people, modern Israel, and the promise of the land are unclear.

The most current PCUSA policy statement on the Middle East is a report entitled "Breaking Down the Walls" and was adopted by the 2010 General Assembly. The report singles out the Israeli presence in the disputed territories as "the major issue" for peace in the region. While affirming "Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders," the report criticizes a long list of Israeli policies and demands changes.

"Breaking Down the Walls" expresses a general desire for "an immediate cessation of all violence, whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians." The Israeli government is clearly held responsible for its use of force against Palestinians; however, the report does not identify the parties responsible for Palestinian violence. At one point it states: "If there were no occupation, there would be no Palestinian resistance." The report notes that "Hamas is a militant organization," but adds, "over 90 percent of Hamas' resources are spent on social services to the Palestinian refugees." By lumping disparate activities under violence, the writers implicitly treat Israeli army strikes against suspected terrorists as morally equivalent to Hamas terrorist attacks on civilians.

Conversely, the statement makes only one request of Palestinian political leaders:

"We call upon the various Palestinian political factions to negotiate a unified government prepared to recognize Israel's existence."

This same kind of moral equivalence appears repeatedly in the PCUSA policy statement. For example, criticism of "threats by Iranians and members of Hamas and Hezbollah against Israel" is balanced by criticism of "Israeli efforts to deny the Nakba [Palestinian refugee

of Palestinians for Middle East Peace (PFMEP) was a surprising alliance of conservative evangelicals and pro-Israel progressives. They were not seeking the assembly's blessing of Israel but rather a sense of fairness toward the legitimate grievances and requirements of both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A circle of pro-Palestinian activists have gathered around the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who are sponsored by the PCUSA, while PFMEP has no official standing.

The 2008 General Assembly pledged: "we will not over-identify with the realities of the Israelis or the Palestinians." A 2009 "Presbyterian Panel" survey revealed consensus on a number of questions related to Israel: 65 percent of PCUSA members support a two-state solution and more than 75 percent responded that maintaining positive relationships with Israel and the Jewish community is important or very important.

In 2012, an IPMN-influenced committee presented a proposal, which was subsequently defeated, that the PCUSA divest its holdings in Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions whose products had been used by the Israeli military. In its place was substituted a call for "active investment" in Palestinian development projects. While the denomination's historic stance is clear, it remains to be seen whether the PCUSA will continue to reflect the pro-Israel will of its members. ■

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flight during the 1948–49 Israeli War of Independence] and threats of a mass transfer (expulsion) of the Palestinians into Jordan or elsewhere."

The report seeks to direct pressure against Israel. Specifically, it insists on "the withholding of U.S. government aid to the state of Israel as long as Israel persists in creating new West Bank settlements." There is no similar suggestion of withholding aid from the Palestinian Authority or other regional governments.

The original draft of "Breaking Down the Walls" was even more harshly anti-Israel than the final product. It was moderated significantly by commissioners at the 2010 General Assembly, as a result of pressure brought by an unusual coalition. Gathered under the banner



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UMACTION

Lake Junaluska Conference Fuels Anti-Israel and Anti-American Bias

by Barton J. Gingerich

LAKE JUNALUSKA was host for a November peace conference. (Photo: Bennettsville First United Methodist Church)

On November 8–11, liberals from across the Southeast retreated to United Methodism’s 2012 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference. United Methodists comprised the majority of spokespeople from an array of interfaith representatives gathered to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The event was sponsored by the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, the Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center, the Metta Center for Nonviolence, The Fellowship of Reconciliation, North Carolina Peace Action, and the American Friends Service Committee.

The Rev. Dr. Bernard Lafayette, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee co-founder, and Leymah Gbowee, 2011 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, opened the conference on Thursday.

By Friday afternoon’s “Non-Violent Resistance in Palestine” workshop by Miko Peled, author of *The General’s Son*, lingering warm sentiments had dissipated. “Americans are perhaps the most misinformed about this issue..., and they often pay the most into this issue,” he complained. Peled further warned, “My point of view isn’t balanced.” Indeed, his roots run throughout Israel’s short history. His grandfather signed the Israeli Declaration of Independence; his father, Mattityahu Peled, served as a high-ranking general before converting to peace activism and liberal politics. Miko has continued down the latter path.

According to Peled, misunderstood Palestinians are innocent victims. Consequently he asserted that Israel engaged in “a massive campaign of ethnic cleansing” and dubbed Israeli Defense soldiers “looters.”

Peled described Zionism as a concept of conquest, ethnic cleansing, de-Arabizing, and imposition of a racially segregated society. He had no sympathy for theological arguments that favored support for Israel, expressing significant doubts about the historicity of the Old Testament. He summarized the American interventionist foreign policy as “anyone in the world can be called a terrorist and then killed and captured.” As for U.S. aid, he exclaimed, “There’s no question that a lot of the money goes to the settlements.” Peled thought dual American-Israeli citizenship was “definitely a big problem.” He deemed the two-state solution “completely unrealistic” and “a fig leaf that Israeli and American politicians use.” He thought one of the best responses was the strategy of boycott, divest, and sanction, known as BDS.

A liberal rabbi in the audience ostensibly challenged Peled, saying, “I think we need to delineate between the situation in the West Bank and Israel generally.” Nevertheless, he did think that the United States supported Israel so loyally since “Israel is an unsinkable American aircraft carrier in the Middle East.”

In another session, South African clergyman Alan Storey worried aloud about how a violent picture of God has infected American policy. The American habit of warmongering threatens rather than achieves safety and security. “The

greatest threat to America is not terrorism; it’s not China; the greatest threat to America is America,” he warned, “Empires implode...because they spend more than they have trying to defend... who they are.” Storey also observed, “God is the heavenly parent of both the murdered and the murderer...The divine takes persecution personally.” On the other hand, he bemoaned, “It’s very difficult to transform a system that we are dependent upon for our livelihood.” There was little room for patriotism in Storey’s analysis. He found inspiration from none other than Bradley Manning, who is detained as a capital offender for passing along classified material to WikiLeaks (and thus enemies of America). Storey implored, “When is the Methodist church of this country going to refuse to allow their children to enter the military?”

The 2012 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference had its highs and lows. Reflecting on civil rights and peace victories no doubt encouraged the mostly older participants. On the other hand, some workshops and dinner conversations tended to devolve into heavily leftist diatribes, exacerbated by a life in the Bible Belt. However, the stunning defeat of divestment legislation at the United Methodist General Conference this past summer points to an uphill battle for anti-Israel activists. 🗳



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Angela Merkel Calls Christianity 'World's Most Persecuted Faith'

by Andrew E. Harrod

Speaking on November 5, 2012, before a synod of Germany's Lutheran Church (*Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands* or EKD), German Chancellor Angela Merkel recently incited national controversy. Merkel's address in Timmendorfer Strand in the German province of Schleswig-Holstein included the passing comment that "Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world." The German federal government had thus made the protection of religious freedom, including that of Christians, into a goal of German foreign policy.

Merkel's singling out of Christianity did not find favor with various human rights advocates, as reported by the German news agency dapd. Human Rights Watch's (HRW) Germany director, Wenzel Michalski, found Merkel's conception "totally senseless" given that all religious persecution is equally wrong, irrespective of faith. Michalski cited Muslims in Burma, Falun Gong members in China, and Jews worldwide as non-Christian examples of persecution victims. A representative of Amnesty International also found Merkel's reference to Christianity "not sensible." Jerzy Montag, a German member of parliament from the Green Party (*Die Grüne*), likewise judged Merkel's estimation to be "misguided," given that any ranking of persecution among religions is "not especially helpful for combating human rights violations."

The United Nations Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, echoed Montag in assessing Merkel's qualification of Christianity as "not especially helpful." Bielefeldt expressed himself as "very reserved" with respect to such quantitative analysis. "Occasionally rumored numbers" indicating a particularly strong persecution of Christians were "not accurately enough demonstrable."

Yet the German branch of the international aid society for persecuted

Christians, Open Doors, supported Merkel. A spokesman for the organization expressed its findings that 80% of all religiously persecuted individuals worldwide were Christian, roughly 100 million people. Volker Kauder, chairman of the Christian Democratic (CDU/CSU) members of the German parliament, also found "accurate" Merkel's prioritization of Christians amidst religiously diverse vic-



ANGELA MERKEL is Germany's first female Chancellor. (Photo: Armin Linnartz/Christian Democratic Union)

tims of persecution globally. Merely listing the world's regions in turmoil such as Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Nigeria, and Syria justified Merkel's statement for Kauder. The chairman thereby placed emphasis on the worsening situation in recent years within Muslim countries for Christians, whose fate would naturally draw the attention of fellow Christians in Germany.

Also supporting Merkel was Alexander Dobrindt, Kauder's parliamentary colleague and general secretary of the Bavarian Christian Social Union (*Christlich-Soziale Union* or CSU), the regional sister party to the nationwide Christian Democratic Union (*Christlich*

Demokratische Union or CDU). Dobrindt thereby singled out the Greens for criticism, declaring that Merkel's emphasis on Christians did not accord with the "Multi-Culti-worldview of the Greens" in which all cultures share fundamentally similar norms. For Dobrindt it was tasteless that the Greens wanted to recognize Muslim holidays in Germany, yet were unwilling "to bend a finger" for protecting Christians around the world.

Analysis of religious persecution around the world indicates that Dobrindt is right to reject such cultural equivalencies. The ranking of the world's 50 most religiously repressive regimes compiled by Open Doors' German branch, for example, lists almost exclusively Muslim-majority nations such as Saudi Arabia and Iran or Marxist-legacy regimes such as China and North Korea. Many of these same names recur among the 17 Countries of Particular Concern cited by the United States Commission on Religious Freedom for their repression. Thus the two greatest opponents globally of religious freedom in general and Christianity in particular are various followers of Muhammad and Marx.

Practical political concerns demand that leaders always consider diplomatic sensitivities, yet Dobrindt, Kauder, and others are right to demand that such sensitivity not come at the price of the truth so necessary for proper policy formation. Such truth requires, among other things, accurate naming of victims and perpetrators. In a time of almost universal political correctness, Merkel, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor, deserves praise for her refreshing honesty. 📷



Andrew E. Harrod is an attorney and freelance writer.



(Photo: The American Jesus)

The Journey Toward a Realigned Protestantism

by Robert Benne

My graduate school days were immersed in the liberal idealism of the pre-60s. (I mark the '60s from 1965–1975.) My teachers were activists in the civil rights, urban ministry, and community organization movements of that time. My doctor father wrote: *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches and New Creation as Metropolis*. I was deeply involved in Dr. Martin Luther King's civil rights movement and identified strongly with urban ministry and the community organization movement, especially the Woodlawn Organization on the South side of Chicago.

When I began teaching at the Lutheran School of Theology in 1965 I was brimming with that liberal idealism and conveyed it to my students, many of whom went into urban ministry. I was excited about the Church as an instrument of social and political transformation and focused on that as the primary mission of the church. Comparatively proclaiming the Gospel seemed retrograde.

Then the real '60s came along. The tremendous upheaval of that decade shook me to my roots. The civil rights movement became Black Power, the student movement became violent, the anti-war movement became anti-American.

Privately reading Kristol, Podhoretz, Novak, and Neuhaus, I came to more conservative conclusions than I ever thought possible. These writers gave me great

comfort because I was thinking the same things.

In the church, I saw the yawning abyss between the radical elite of the churches and the mostly conservative laity. The latter had a deep conviction that social and political action was not the main mission of the Church. It was their actions that made apparent to me the danger of secularizing and instrumentalizing faith.

One well-formed Senator is worth a thousand statements.

I publicly criticized the consistent left-wing tilt only to be warned by the Church and Society Division head that I would be isolated from leadership due to my stance.

The main reason I am on the outside pertains to: the authority of Scripture and the Great Tradition of Christian moral teaching, and the deflation of the Gospel of Redemption into the Gospel of Inclusion. We should speak less but more authoritatively on a selected set of issues out of our own theological/ethical principles, not political fads. There are limited issues around which all Christians can rally; how the Israelis defend themselves is certainly not one of them.

I pondered this publicly in *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and*

Politics, which presents several theses. It is bad and impossible to separate religion and politics or to fuse them. Religion—in its organized form—should engage critically with politics. The Church's best and most important way to influence political life is indirectly through the formation of its laity, who will then become the voters and political actors in the society and members of voluntary associations.

In most cases there is no warrant for the church to speak and act directly.

There are, I presume, four issues where most Christians agree as they move from core to policy: (1) the provision of an adequate safety net for those in our society who are unable to make their way in it (children, wounded veterans, physically and mentally handicapped persons), (2) the protection of unborn human life, (3) upholding traditional marriage and the nuclear family, and (4) religious freedom.

Christians' agreement on the general direction of these values does not cease argument over public policy, but it at least puts us on the same page. At all costs, we should avoid tethering ourselves to political ideology or party.

Meanwhile, however, let's hope and pray that our parishes are doing the work of formation of laity, where resides the real political impact. As we can all agree, one well-formed Senator is worth a thousand statements. ■



Robert Benne is a Lutheran and ethicist who is a professor emeritus at Roanoke College in Virginia. He delivered the above abridged remarks at the Ecumenical Leadership Summit in Dallas earlier this year (see pages 8–9).

'Biblical Womanhood' Is Not 'Women's Work'

by Kristin L. Rudolph

Rachel Held Evans, the evangelical (perhaps “post-evangelical”) blogger and author, has been hitting media outlets promoting her book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband ‘Master.’* In her *Today Show* and *The View* interviews, Evans describes how she “set out to follow all of the Bible’s instructions for women as literally as possible for a year to show that no woman, no matter how devout, is actually practicing biblical womanhood all the way.” Instead the book is about “the validity of the Bible,” with which Evans “wrestles,” not “biblical womanhood.”

Her focus has been on the household tasks she performed during her “biblical” year, which distorts complementarian understandings of gender roles. In so doing, she perpetuates the harmful idea that biblical gender roles can be reduced to a list of tasks and chores.

I experienced firsthand complementarian readings of “biblical womanhood” during a college internship at a reformed Baptist Church that embraced this perspective. Female interns were tasked with nursery duty, helping with wedding and baby showers, teaching children’s classes, and little else. I love children, and I can appreciate the tradition of wedding and baby showers despite dreading them. After being practically barred from participating in the worship team and excluded from even observing a preaching class where male interns learned how to study and teach Scripture, I couldn’t help but feel shafted.

Many of the young boys in the church had already internalized a sense

of superiority over women. One middle schooler assumed only a male leader could drive the car home from a field trip, and a second grader in my mid-week class was incredulous that I would teach without the male co-teacher. In a particularly alarming episode, a fellow intern informed me that vacuuming was a “woman’s job,” and that “women are lower than men.”

I don’t think anyone at this church intended to demean women, but that was ultimately the result of their task-centric definition of womanhood. If my internship experience accurately reflected the “complementarian” view, I want no part of it. Certain roles of leadership within the Church are reserved for men and plenty of others are open to women. There are significant differences between men and women, which is why I think God designed us to “complement” each other. If that makes me a “complementarian,” then so be it.

Often the biblical gender role discussion is reduced to a power struggle and the division of household chores. It seems that Evans succumbed to this temptation. She takes on other practices such as gentleness and submission during her year-long “experiment,” but mainly focuses on daily tasks like washing the dishes and sewing clothes.

A 1950s Cleaveresque arrangement is probably not realistic or desirable for most families. Biblical womanhood depends on the needs of each particular family. Rachel Held Evans is right: “biblical womanhood is not as simple as it

sounds.” That, however, is not a good reason to give it up entirely.

Growing up in an evangelical and often legalistic church, I can relate to Evans. I too have wondered what “biblical womanhood” means and how much cultural context has skewed our idea of it. I struggle with the Apostle Peter’s admonition to exhibit the “unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.” I am not married, but the idea of one day “submitting” to a husband is sometimes unsettling.

Over the past few years, I have landed on both sides of the “egalitarian/complementarian” debate. I do not lightly dismiss her writings on the subject, but I cannot conscientiously practice only what “help[s] me love God better,” as she does.

The Bible allows freedom for a couple to determine what works for their family. It also sets standards for how women and men are to relate to one another in marriage. The Bible’s instruction to husbands to love and wives to submit is far more relational than pragmatic. Though our cultural context has changed, the nature of marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and his Church, as stated in Ephesians 5:25, remains the same. 📖



(Photo: FaithVillage.com)



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IRD Diary: Confessions of a Former 'None'

by Nathaniel D. Torrey

There has been much speculation about the “nones,” the increasing number of people who do not identify with any particular religious denomination. A Pew Research Center poll shows that nearly one-fifth of all Americans and nearly one-third of young people under thirty are not affiliated with a particular religion or denomination. This does not necessarily imply a crisis of faith in America; many nones still profess to believe in God or some ultimate being. Instead the rise of nones appears to convey an aversion to denominational loyalty.

For most of my life, I was a none. I've only been a professing Christian for a very short time and I was not raised in any particular religious tradition at all. I identify as Eastern Orthodox, and have been going to Orthodox services for more than a year now as a catechumen, but have not been formally received into the Church and still await my baptism and chrismation (I have never been baptized in any denomination, even as an infant).

There are also those who eschew the religious label all together, as it has become synonymous with political conservatism, homophobia, and sexism. According to the poll, a none is more likely to vote Democratic and affirm the legalization of abortion and same-sex marriage. *Sojourners* writer Alyssa Bain expressed the following: “I am more and more hesitant to label myself Christian as I see traditional denominations come to the spotlight for being closely

affiliated with so-called right-wing politics. Instead, I distance myself.”

I was not raised to be an atheist. Quite the contrary, I was always told that a higher power exists, there was meaning and purpose in the world, and that it mattered how I acted. This did not manifest itself in any particular tradition or regular church attendance. I was raised in accordance with traditional morality:

In hindsight, I was too afraid to commit to any worldview.

Things like lying, stealing, and cheating were always wrong. God was not cited as the reason why good things are good and bad things bad. They simply were.

I suspect my parents raised me this way because they wanted me to be able to choose what to believe. There is nobility in this sentiment, that the ultimate ground of reality and our relationship to it is serious enough that it should not be imposed willy-nilly. I was given nearly absolute freedom in figuring out where I fit in the grand scheme of things (it upset my mother grievously when I proclaimed I was an atheist in high school, a period that lasted

until college, when I shifted to a softer agnostic phase).

My experience might be similar to what many “nones” grew up with. Parents, in a spirit of liberal and democratic plurality, don't wish to impose what they see as their worldview on their children. In this day and age it is very modern and progressive to always leave all the options on the table. To remove some

of the options strikes many as narrow-minded. It is not only in abortion that we are a pro-choice people; it has expanded even to one's entire view of the cosmos and one's relation to it.

For most of my college experience, I was firmly in favor of having all the options before me. In hindsight, I was too afraid to commit to any worldview. In one moment I was a moralist, championing pagan virtue and natural law, and in my next breath I was a nihilist, preaching will to power and the meaninglessness of life.

Eventually, I realized that if I cared about Truth, I could not remain a shopping skeptic forever. Implicitly, the wandering free-thinking skeptic is “there for the journey,” denying that human beings and the Truth can interact. We will most certainly make mistakes as we fumble towards the divine, but to begin we must take, as they say, a leap of faith. ☒



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