



The Politics of Jen Hatmaker

page 8

ALSO INSIDE:

- ▶ Ravi Zacharias on Responding in Our Divided Moment page 10
- ▶ InterVarsity's Fidelity to Orthodoxy Deserves our Appreciation page 11
- ▶ American's Top Criterion for Finding a New Church page 12
- ▶ Nude Female 'Christa' Back at Episcopal Cathedral page 13



Students pray during an InterVarsity gathering at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia. See article on page 11. (Photo: Roanoke College/Wikimedia Commons)

FEATURES

- 5 CHURCH NEWS:
Canadian Church
Moves to Defrock
Atheist Pastor

- 7 INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS:
Global South Missing
from World Methodist
Conference Speakers

- 16 IRD DIARY: Open Letter
to the President-Elect:
Pressure Pakistan to
Release Asia Bibi
by Faith J. H. McDonnell



PROGRAMS

Evangelical

- 8 The Politics of Jen Hatmaker Derryck Green
10 Ravi Zacharias on Responding in Our Divided Moment Jeff Walton
11 InterVarsity's Fidelity to Orthodoxy Deserves Our Appreciation Chelsen Vicari

Anglican

- 12 Americans' Top Criterion for Finding a New Church Joseph Rossell
13 Nude Female 'Christa' Back at Episcopal Cathedral Jeff Walton

Presbyterian

- 14 PCUSA Official Spreads Divisive Post-Election Discourse Peter Johnson

United Methodist

- 15 LGBTQ Activities Disrupt UMC Bishops' Meeting Joseph Rossell

Religious Liberty

- 16 IRD Diary: An Open Letter to the President-Elect:
Pressure Pakistan to Release Asia Bibi Faith J. H. McDonnell

faith & freedom

VOLUME 35 NUMBER 4



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(Photo: RightNow Media).

James Dobson and Christian Pessimism

In the run up to the recent U.S. presidential election, longtime evangelical leader James Dobson, at the venerable age of 80, warned of irreversible consequences if Hillary Clinton were to be elected.

“...We won’t ever recover from it!” Dobson said. “We will go down in flames, maybe literally, if we put the wrong person in power.”

Maybe Dobson, who’s justifiably concerned about growing assaults on religious liberty and rights of conscience, was right. Others sounded similar warnings about Donald Trump, whose authoritarian rhetoric they feared foreshadows collapsing confidence in democracy and constitutionalism in favor of strong-man rule. Maybe they’re right.

There’s nothing new about apocalyptic chatter in American politics. New England Federalists in the 1800 election claimed the allegedly atheist Thomas Jefferson, who was actually privately Unitarian, would as President close churches and burn Bibles, like the French revolutionaries with whom he initially sympathized. Frontier revivalists countered that John Adams was a closet monarchist serving the British crown. Neither of these scenarios unfolded.

Hyperbolic scare talk is not limited to traditional religionists. The secular prophets of environmentalism routinely warn that a few more SUVs on the highway will irretrievably push the planet into a calamitous, carbon-fueled death spiral landing in permanent Hades. Scare talk gets attention, mobilizes followers, and can sometimes achieve partial—though rarely sustainable—political gains.

More typically, apocalyptic political warnings are not vindicated, with a few exceptions, like Churchill’s warnings about Hitler and appeasement, or Demosthenes’ oratory against Philip II of Macedon. The ancient Hebrew prophets are the model of such jeremiads. Their dark prophecies were fulfilled because they of course spoke with divine authority, usually resulting in their own martyrdom. Few if any others have similar authority.

Very possibly America is on the edge of some horrendous, irrevocable collapse. Maybe we are akin to Weimar Germany, decadent, confused, divided, and preparing to surrender our ancient liberties in favor of some ominous new tyrannical order. Possibly, but I don’t expect so.

From my own personal observations, America—in reality versus the hysteria and rantings of the Internet and cable television—is not hovering on collapse. My knowledge of America is hardly comprehensive. But I don’t entirely live in an insulated bubble. I travel all over the country, usually by car, sometimes

by train, avoiding airplanes and airports. I stay at Holiday Inn Express, eat at Cracker Barrel and downtown diners, talk to fellow train passengers and fellow hotel guests at the breakfast bar.

Some of my most extensive conversations are with cab drivers but also waitresses, desk clerks, fellow tourists at historic sites, and shop keepers. Almost every day I walk four or five miles in different neighborhoods, observing people, commerce, and regional habits.

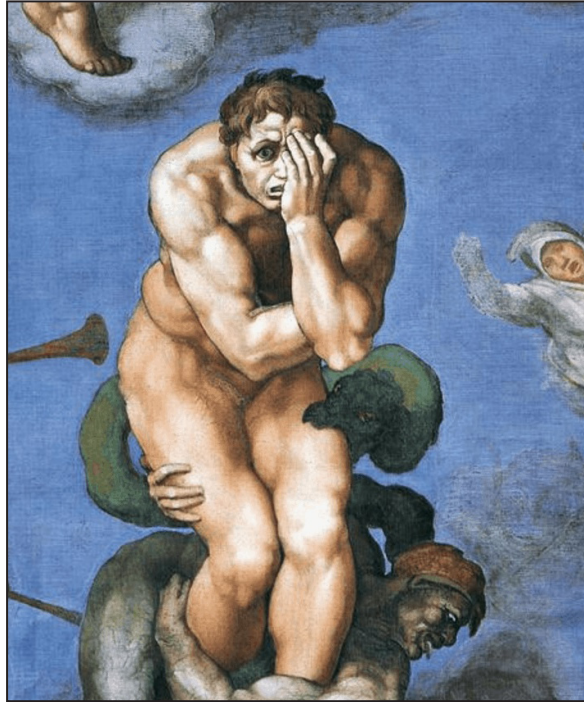
Almost always I’m impressed by the good will, good manners, good humor, and good spirits of the random people of all ethnicities and economic classes whom I meet. They generally work hard, seem mostly happy, and are optimistic. The country seems prosperous. Lots of sprawling suburbs full of new houses everywhere I go. Omnipresent shopping malls pulsate with shoppers. Old downtowns I visit usually have experienced some revitalization. Even in poor regions I will find restaurants full of seemingly working class diners with fairly nice cars outside. People generally seem healthy, although Americans—

especially the ones at Cracker Barrel—eat too much, reflective of their wealth and comfort.

All the churches I visit everywhere seem full of respectful and devout people who to varying degrees are serious about their faith. Supposedly America is post-Christian, but I’m often struck by strangers who randomly discuss their faith. In restaurants, as an inveterate eavesdropper, I’ll often overhear substantive religious conversations among families and friends.

I like to visit old downtowns. Court houses are always tidy, patriotic statues are usually well maintained, and flags

Continued on page 4



Detail from Michelangelo's "The Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel.

Mark Tooley



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

James Dobson and Christian Pessimism

Continued from page 3

are everywhere I go. I never hear racial animosity or racial resentments in my encounters. Nor do I ever hear disrespect for the country. Some of the best conversations are with DC cab drivers. Elderly DC natives, usually black men, often recall moving here from farms in the South, serving in the military, buying a DC house in the 1960s for \$20,000 that is now worth \$600,000 or \$700,000, making them among the world's wealthiest people. They enjoy their grandchildren but still want to work. They invariably say their city is a better place than 50 years ago.

Recently I chatted with a black woman who works at a private club I frequent. She's been there since 1958 and met the Eisenhowers many times. She'll retire when she's completed 60 years. Is this city better now than when you were a girl, I asked. She recalled a happy childhood in Washington, but said the city is better now, with "more going on."

Most DC cab drivers are African immigrants or sometimes south Asian. If asked, their stories are always fascinating. Many are from Ethiopia, having escaped the old Marxist and murderous Mengistu regime. Often these men have survived terrible horrors. Invariably they are very happy and grateful to be in America, although they are working 70-80 hours weekly to support wives and children in nice suburban houses, far different from war-torn villages from their past on another continent.

No place in America resembles any part of Africa politically or economically. But much is made of the white working class' marginalization in a global economy, in places like West Virginia, where I often spend time at a family home. Many of my neighbors there certainly fit into this category. Yet they survive, often on disability and odd jobs. They have their struggles. Yet they have homes, cars, modern luxuries, including giant screen TVs and wi-fi. Their trips to Walmart seem frequent. And they seem, on the whole, happy.

One of my West Virginia neighbors, sadly now in prison, lived on \$700 monthly from Social Security, plus odd jobs, plus

recycling beer cans. He drank and smoked and worked hard. There was a large slash across his chest from open heart surgery, an operation that until the recent past billionaires and kings could not procure. From his last prison photo, my friend, now approaching 80, still looks robust.

Americans of all classes and races are the most privileged, wealthiest, most protected, pampered and coddled, freest and most fortunate people in human history. At our worst, we live better than kings of old. Our society like all cultures everywhere and at all times is plagued by every form of vice and human depravity, to which each of us sinners contributes. Yet we should thank God continuously for our undeserved blessings. He may conclusively judge our sinful country, just as he justifiably could have in 1916 or 1816. Yet he is long suffering, and his mercy is wide.

Our country, by his unmerited grace, is much, much more than either presidential candidate, neither of whom has the power to destroy us. Unless he wills otherwise, we will survive, and perhaps thrive. Dobson and many others are

rightly concerned about religious liberty. The church's marriage teaching is now despised by secular culture, just as the church's teaching on slavery, racial equality, gender equality, justice for the poor, and temperance for all, has been despised and fiercely resisted in the past. In every age the church has its battles, and we are vain to think our own times are the worst. The church, so long as it contends for God-ordained human dignity, will ultimately prevail.

We Christians in America, with our nice homes, nice families, nice cars, nice churches and countless nice creature comforts, often like to complain and predict doom. In recent years I have met increasing numbers of African Christians who have almost none of what we have and instead have survived wars, dictatorships, persecution, famines, and disease. They live on the edge from day to day. Yet they rarely speak apocalyptically, complain, or predict doom. They are not naive but they are usually hopeful.

A Christian witness that is ungrateful, sour, and direly fatalistic, without hope or serious confidence in God's superintending mercy, is not effective, truthful or faithful. As the Psalmist urged: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. Be thankful to him, and bless his name (Psalm 100:4)." ✚

Americans' Top Criterion for Finding a New Church

Continued from page 10

illustrates that finding a new church usually involved a strong interpersonal element.

This data heightens the contrast between differing strategies for reaching new members. As Pew's data show, this largely depends on the demographic a church is attempting to reach. In a timely discussion, Pastor Andy Stanley and Dr. Russell Moore recently discussed these varied approaches at the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commissions (ERLC) conference in Nashville, as IRD Evangelical Director Chelsen Vicari reported in the Fall 2016 issue of *Faith & Freedom*.

Stanley's approach was to create a very welcoming and non-confrontational church environment where marginally religious (and even non-religious)

individuals would feel comfortable attending. Stanley affirmed that there was absolute truth, but stated that "our goal is not to simply be right, our goal isn't simply to make a point, our goal is to invite people to take a step towards surrendering their lives to Jesus Christ."

Moore emphasized a divergent approach. He placed greater weight on theological accuracy and appeals to scriptural authority. As Vicari summarized, he longed for "a consistent confidence in the Bible as the Word of God among church leaders as they speak both to the congregation and to the world," while still joining with Stanley in urging "the American church to have a sense of broken-heartedness for secular society." ✚

Canadian Church Moves to Defrock Atheist Pastor

The United Church of Canada (UCC) is the latest denomination to confront an outspoken pastor who freely claims to be an atheist.

In a *Toronto Star* story from September, UCC minister Gretta Vosper of Scarborough, Ontario, is reported to be at risk of defrocking by the Canadian church.

"In our opinion, she is not suitable to continue in ordained ministry because she does not believe in God, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit," the church's Toronto Conference Review Committee concluded in a 39-page report.

According to the *Star*, the 23-person committee voted 19 to 4 in favor of a motion that found Vosper "unsuitable to continue serving."

The 57-year-old Vosper says that she does not believe in an interventionist, supernatural God. Her views are not new; in 2008 she authored *With or Without God: Why the Way We Live Is More Important Than What We Believe*. Later she published *Amen: What Prayer Can*

Mean in a World Beyond Belief. However, it was not until three years ago that Vosper chose to identify herself as an atheist.

"My sadness is for the many clergy and members and individuals currently studying for leadership in the UCC who are now also being told they need to keep quiet about their true beliefs or risk censure," Vosper told the *Star* in an email.

According to the *Toronto newspaper*, Vosper has been an outspoken voice in a growing movement within the UCC toward downplaying Jesus and the Bible, and adopting a metaphorical interpretation of religious symbols and a greater emphasis on

humanist, environmental, and social justice causes.

The UCC is a merger of Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist churches that formed in 1925 as a Mainline Reformed denomination. The denomination reported having 436,292 members at the end of 2014, less than half the 1,063,951 it had at its peak in 1964. ✚

Gretta Vosper leads a Sunday service at West Hill United Church in Scarborough, Ontario, in 2015. (Photo: J.P. Moczulski / The Toronto Star)



Episcopalians Continue Uninterrupted Decline

Declines in Episcopal Church membership continue a downward spiral that began in the early 2000s. Updated statistics made available this autumn by the Episcopal Church Office of Research show a denomination continuing a gradual, uninterrupted decline in 2015. The U.S.-based denomination shed 37,669 members in 2015, a decline of 2.1 percent, while attendance declined 20,631, down 3.4 percent. A net 43 parishes closed.

The pattern is consistent with past years, in which dioceses in New England, the Rust Belt, and predominantly rural areas post sharp declines, while dioceses in the South decline at a more gradual rate.

Episcopal Church officials, including former Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori—who completed a nine-year term in office in late 2015—predicted that decline would level off after years of internal dispute and the departure of dioceses, congregations, and individual members. While there were no major congregational departures in 2015, the denomination still exceeded its baseline rate of decline by a substantial margin. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has struck an optimistic tone, encouraging the church to embrace its role in "the Jesus Movement" even as he seeks to address a workplace culture marked by "fear, mistrust and resentment" at the church's national headquarters,

according to staff who answered a survey in the wake of a misconduct scandal and two high-level firings.

The denomination continues to see church size shrink, with the average Episcopal parish attracting 58 worshipers on a Sunday, down from an average of 65 in 2011. The trend lines do not bode well for the future, with 55 percent of congregations experiencing decline of 10% or greater in the past five years. In contrast, only 18 percent of congregations grew their attendance by 10 percent in the same time span. The denomination has experienced a 26 percent drop in attendance since 2005. ✚

European United Methodists Weigh in Against Lesbian Bishop

United Methodists in the Northern Europe have sent a message of disapproval following the election of an openly partnered lesbian bishop this past summer (an election which is in the process of being challenged).

During its October 19–23 quadrennial meeting, the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference affirmed the process of the Council of Bishops appointing a commission on human sexuality. It specifically highlighted language from the relevant General Conference motion committing to uphold the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*. They expressed sadness at some divisive actions in the most liberal regions of U.S. United Methodism.

These European delegates also made clear that there is no significant support among them for the Western Jurisdiction's attempt to make lesbian activist Karen Oliveto of San Francisco a bishop.

The Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference is one of the three "central conferences" into which the denomination is geographically organized in Europe.

In June, the Estonia Annual Conference, one of the constituent annual conferences of this central conference, adopted a resolution strongly affirming a traditionalist, biblical view of marriage and sexual morality, and urging the denomination to uphold these values.

In contrast, a resolution to affirm the U.S. Western Jurisdiction's move to elect openly partnered lesbian activist Oliveto garnered zero votes in the central conference meeting, with not a single representatively elected delegate from any of the ten annual conferences in the Northern Europe and Eurasia Conference willing to express their support for Oliveto's election. ✚

United Methodists at the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference pray with Bishop Christian Alsted following his re-election to lead the church in northern Europe during the October 19-23 gathering. His area includes Denmark, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. (Photo: Karl Anders Ellingsen/UMNS)





Bishop Ivan Abrahams, World Methodist Council General Secretary, and other leaders (Photo: World Methodist Council)

Global South Missing from World Methodist Conference Speakers

Hundreds of Methodists from scores of Wesleyan denominations attended the World Methodist Conference

in Houston this autumn. Most participants were from overseas. But missing among the plenary speakers were persons currently living in Africa, where most of Methodism now exists and where it is flourishing.

The council includes 80 Methodist denominations of 80 million members from 133 countries and meets every 5 years. Among its members is the U.S.-based United Methodist Church, plus evangelical denominations like the Free Methodist Church, Wesleyan Church, and Church of the Nazarene, along with historic black denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The council is consultative with no juridical authority.

There were no major plenary speakers from the Global South except Brazilian Methodist Bishop João Carlos Lopes. Other speakers were from the U.S. or United Kingdom, where Methodism is mostly declining. Liberal and nearly all-white declining denominations in the First World represent only about 10 percent of global Methodism.

The conference closed with a joint presentation from an Irish Methodist, a Korean, and a South African taking turns reading from a script that was themed towards the Social Gospel and political liberation while being dismissive of evangelism. Methodist theologian Wesley Ariarajah was approvingly quoted for rejecting attempts to evangelize adherents of other religions.

One young Brazilian, who is now a United Methodist living in the U.S., tweeted: “Clichés w/ no Wesleyan theological/missiological clarity during [World Methodist Conference] finale. Signals time to give mic away from west to global south!”

The next World Methodist Conference meets in 2021 in Sweden, and hopefully the Global South majority will have a greater voice there. ✚

NCC Cheers Cuba Vote

Prior to the death of former long-time Cuban President Fidel Castro in November, Cuba was already in the news as the United States for the first time in 25 years abstained on a vote at the United Nations condemning the American embargo against the Communist-governed island nation. The resolution is perennially “used by Cuba and many others to castigate the United States,” according to *The New York Times*.

One ecumenical coalition claiming to represent 45 million American Christians explicitly celebrated the vote along with the Obama administration.

While the *National Review* called the vote an “abandonment of the people of Cuba, who are struggling, and suffering, for their freedom” against a communist regime, the *Times* reported that U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power “beamed” as she announced the decision. The National Council of Churches (NCC) joined Power.

“We receive this news with gratitude and celebrate with our counterpart, the Cuban Council of Churches,” NCC President and General Secretary Jim Winkler cheered in a statement on October 27. He also called for a complete end to the U.S. embargo against Cuba.

“The next step is for the U.S. Congress to lift the blockade against Cuba,” the statement from the church council asserted, uniquely placing the burden of action upon the U.S. Congress.

Unmentioned was any call for the Cuban regime to cease arresting dissidents, free jailed journalists, or permit an expansion of religious liberty for the island nation’s Christian population.

The NCC counts the United Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian (U.S.A.) churches among its members and once employed hundreds of staffers at its Manhattan headquarters. The ecumenical council has fallen far since its founding, undergoing multiple rounds of layoffs and now reduced to half a dozen staff, a budget of \$1.4 million, and a single office in the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill.

U.S. church groups and officials often praised Castro’s regime for its supposed uplift of the poor while ignoring the suffering of its victims. As NCC President, United Methodist Bishop James Armstrong led a delegation to Cuba in 1977. He explained their indifference to Castro’s prisoners:

“There is significant difference between a situation where people are imprisoned for opposing regimes designed to perpetuate inequalities (as in Chile and Brazil, for example) and situations where people are imprisoned for opposing regimes designed to remove inequities (as in Cuba).”

Rightist dictatorships were condemned, but communist ones got a pass. A quarter century later, it is unclear how many lessons—if any—have been learned by Castro’s longtime religious apologists. ✚



Author Jen Hatmaker
(Photo: LIFE Outreach International)

The Politics of Jen Hatmaker

An Evangelical author finds herself influenced more by Leftism than Christianity

by Derryck Green

The recently completed 2016 U.S. presidential election cultivated divergent Christian appraisals of the candidates.

President-Elect Donald Trump's unconventional and unexpected campaign forced evangelicals into a fratricidal conflict that has and will change the context of conservative Christian political witness going forward.

While the friction has at times been exaggerated and pharisaical, generally, it's a good thing.

The public bickering among Christians has been awkward, but a separation between religious conservatives and the Republican Party is overdue. This is a necessary step to salvage and redeem the religious and theological character of evangelicalism. This renovation project is indispensable to the moral integrity of Christian sociopolitical testimony.

The same can't be said of so-called Christian Progressives.

There was little internal disagreement about the moral conflict of supporting Hillary Clinton in light of her tendency

of systematic corruption and dishonesty. Many on the Christian Left simply rationalized and compartmentalized Clinton's character flaws—not so much as the lesser of two evils (though there is some of that)—as a political and moral obligation to support her candidacy. By default, they also support other progressive social policies of the Left.

And they have used every opportunity to say as much.

Christian author, public speaker, and reality-TV personality Jen Hatmaker granted an interview to Religion News Service to discuss her perspective on the 2016 presidential election, her views on homosexuality, abortion, and Black Lives Matter. For those unfamiliar with Hatmaker, the author of *7* and *For the Love: Fighting for Grace in a World of Impossible Standards* maintains a large social media following and has been compared to influential women's Bible study leader Beth Moore.

In the pre-election interview—filled with half-truths and straw-man positions—Hatmaker began by addressing

and glossing over Clinton's character, admitting that she was still open to voting for Clinton.

She then criticized Trump's behavior as unfit for the presidency; here, I don't necessarily disagree with her. Donald Trump continues to do and say numerous things undeserving of the Executive Office.

But I think Hatmaker erred in repeating the mistake of oversimplifying who and why people support Trump. There are, to be certain, "deplorable" people backing Trump. Anti-Semitic, ethno-nationalists, and white supremacists fit this distinction. But I think it's a mistake to dismiss and unfairly generalize those, Christians included, who reject this kind of disgraceful racial populism, but still maintain support for Trump.

Hatmaker then discussed her views on gay marriage and LGBT community. It's no surprise what she believes with respect to this issue. She says,

From a civil rights and civil liberties side and from just a human being side, any two adults have the right to

choose who they want to love. And they should be afforded the same legal protections as any of us. I would never wish anything less for my gay friends... Not only are these our neighbors and friends, but they are brothers and sisters in Christ. They are adopted into the same family as the rest of us, and the church hasn't treated the LGBT community like family.

Whether gay neighbors or friends, it's not about choosing whom to love. That has never been the issue. People are free to choose whom to love. It's about reinventing marriage as a social justice concept.

Moreover, marriage isn't a "civil right," or a "liberty," nor is it found in the Constitution. No one, gay or straight, had the "right" to marry until the Supreme Court created one specifically for gays and lesbians.

And what about the civil rights of Christians who've experienced discrimination because of this newfound LGBTQIA "right"?

Mirroring the Supreme Court, Hatmaker wants the church to make special considerations for gay/lesbian Christians that we shouldn't (and don't) make for other Christians. Gay Christians may be kinfolk in Christ, but that doesn't necessitate Christians excusing sin, twisting theology, and upending the divine ordination of man-woman marriage to exhibit religious compassion. Like many other groups, the church is defined by orthodoxy, designated by what it believes and what it does not.

Hatmaker then discusses her expanded understanding of being pro-life when she says,

...my pro-life ethic has infinitely expanded from just simply being anti-abortion...pro-life includes the life of the struggling single mom who decides to have that kid and they're poor. It means being pro-refugee. It means being pro-Muslim. My pro-life ethic...has expanded.

There's something incredibly disingenuous about a Christian

community that screams about abortion, but then refuses to support the very programs that are going to stabilize vulnerable, economically fragile families that decide to keep their kids. Some Christians want the baby born, but then don't want to help the mama raise that baby.

This view of what it means to be pro-life, though accurate, is falsely used to marginalize Christian anti-abortionists. The Christians she refers to are caricatures. Hatmaker uses the superficial talk-

It's not about choosing whom to love. That has never been the issue.

ing points of the Left to malign and deride fellow religious pro-lifers. It's inappropriate, especially for a Christian.

Additionally, what pro-lifer/anti-abortion Christian is against helping poor single moms? Or supporting programs to help those in need? Hatmaker misrepresented pro-life anti-abortion Christians presumably because they disagree with an expansive welfare state that encourages dependency and compromises human dignity.

What does being "pro-refugee" mean? Sounds good, but it doesn't mean anything because Hatmaker doesn't define it in real terms.

Same with being "pro-Muslim." What does that mean, exactly? Supporting all Muslims, even the ones who believe it is Allah's will to maim and kill nonbelievers?

Hatmaker finishes by highlighting her racial justice cred, saying she supports Black Lives Matter based on "evidence and documented research." She also voices concern over the potential (inevitable, she thinks) treatment of her adopted black son by police in the future.

The church is AWOL on racial unity and reconciliation and it has outsourced

its moral obligation to lead onto racial and social justice warriors. But Christians should be skeptical of Black Lives Matter. It's a movement methodically based on lies and deliberately diverts attention away from more pressing issues that would actually establish that black lives matter.

Evidence and research both undermine the foundation upon which Black Lives Matter is built. According to the *Washington Post*, in 2015, police killed twice as many whites as blacks. Out of a total of 991 shot and killed by police, 496 (or 50%) were white and 258 (or 26%) were black, of which 188 had a deadly weapon on them when shot.

Of the 258 blacks shot and killed by police in 2015, only 38 were unarmed. Of the 38 who were unarmed, all but 8 were shot and killed because they resisted arrest, attacked an officer, tried to flee and/or defied orders of compliance. Only eight unarmed blacks who likely posed no threat were shot and killed by police.

As of December 1, 878 people have been shot and killed by police—202 were black, 388 were white. Of the 202 blacks shot and killed, 16 were unarmed, and all but three resisted arrest, refused orders of compliance and submission, attempted to flee, or attacked an officer.

The claim that blacks are being methodically targeted and killed by the police for being black is not true. Furthermore, blacks are not dying in the numbers or rates suggested by Black Lives Matter.

Jen Hatmaker would know this if she actually looked it up.

I'm not sure what happened to Jen Hatmaker, but this exemplifies the shameful quality of thought on the Religious Left. Religious Progressives should follow the lead of their evangelical brethren and divorce themselves from progressive politics to salvage what's left of their credibility. ✚



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Ravi Zacharias on Responding in Our Divided Moment

by Jeff Walton

Emptiness and meaninglessness is now systemic and is “almost global” in millennial culture, according to Christian apologist Dr. Ravi Zacharias. In an October talk before an estimated 20,000 mostly young evangelical Christians, the author and speaker sought to address how they can respond to an increasingly divided environment—characterized by declining virtue alongside unfiltered opinions—and “be an answer in a very dark world right now.”

The Christian apologist and author appeared at Q Commons, an evangelical conference series telecast to 100 sites across the United States and overseas. Begun as a project of evangelical author Gabe Lyons, Q is frequently compared to TED Talks with a format of short, timed presentations and a focus on cultural engagement.

Beginning with Psalms chapter 11 verse 3: “If the foundations are being destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” Zacharias quoted 20th Century British journalist and media personality Malcolm Muggeridge:

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that 20th Century Man has decided to abolish himself. Tired of the struggle to be himself, he has created boredom out of his own affluence, impotence out of his own erotomania, and vulnerability out of his own strength. He himself blows the trumpet that brings the walls of his own cities crashing down until at last educated into imbecility, having drugged and polluted himself into stupefaction, he keels over, a weary, battered old brontosaurus, and becomes extinct.

Zacharias also drew upon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1964 Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Address:

I refuse to believe that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life. I refuse to believe that man is so

tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.

Zacharias noted that, despite pointing to different destinations, Muggeridge and King were both speaking amidst the cultural upheaval of the 1960s.

“If we believe that ‘unarmed truth and unconditional love’ will ultimately have final word in reality, then our entire educational system today—particularly higher education—is built on a flawed foundation,” Zacharias assessed. “With a scientific single vision, what imperatives of truth and love come from that particular discipline? Unarmed truth and unconditional love are metaphysical propositions, or dare I suggest, spiritual realities.”

Recounting his arrival in the west in the 1960s, Zacharias wondered how accumulation of wealth and comfort in his new home of Toronto existed alongside rebellion and unhappiness.

Zacharias recounted social theorist Peter Berger’s writings about cultural moods arising at that time, listing secularization, pluralization, and privatization: Secularization in which religious institutions lost their social significance, pluralization in which none of a competing number of available worldviews was dominant, and privatization where there was breakdown between public and private expressions and the sacred became relegated to the private.

“That’s where we actually ended up, in the desacralization of life and the loss of meaning,” Zacharias announced. “Secularization brought us to a societal mood without shame, pluralization brought us to a state from the universities where skepticism was rampant and there was no reason and logic. Privatization where there was a loss of meaning.”

Evangelist Ravi Zacharias speaks before 40,000 students at the Passion conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in January 2016. (Photo: Ravi Zacharias International Ministries)

Zacharias identified four pillars “on which the foundations must stand”: eternity, morality, accountability, and charity. “These are all biblical mandates,” he declared.

“Eternity gives us the greatest perspective, morality teaches us to love the greatest law: to love God with all our hearts, all our minds, and all our soul and all our strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves,” Zacharias explained. “Accountability gives us the greatest problem: that it is from within, the problem of self-centeredness and sin that destroys within us.”

“We have lost our purpose for existence, and the reason we have lost our purpose is because we have lost connection with the creator,” Zacharias identified. “Charity gives us the greatest ethic, the greatest perspective, the greatest commandment, the greatest problem and the greatest ethic, which takes us ultimately to love.”

Zacharias proposed that restoring these four pillars “starts with your heart and mind—unless you and I are willing to admit the brokenness within, we will never be able to solve the brokenness without.”

God, Zacharias assured, provided the answer in Jesus Christ: “we the church must carry that light, that eternal perspective that we must give to them: the greatest commandment, the accountability of every human being, and the charity we must display in a culture of so many tensions.”

Continued on page 13



Jeffrey H. Walton is the Communications Manager and Anglican Program Director at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

InterVarsity's Fidelity to Orthodoxy Deserves Our Appreciation

by Chelsen Vicari

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA, an evangelical campus ministry, announced it will dismiss employees, starting on November 11, who do not uphold the evangelical belief that marriage is a biblical covenant between a man and a woman.

Despite swift demonization and cyber-bullying against InterVarsity, the parachurch ministry's policy is not a witch hunt for same-sex marriage supporters among its staff. According to *Time's* Elizabeth Dias, who first broke this news (if we can really call it news), only staff who come forward to disagree with God's design for marriage and sexuality will be placed on a two-week termination period. Dias reported:

Staffers are not being required to sign a document agreeing with the group's position, and supervisors are not proactively asking employees to verbally affirm it. Instead, staffers are being asked to come forward voluntarily if they disagree with the theological position. When they inform their supervisor of their disagreement, a two-week period is triggered, concluding in their last day. InterVarsity has offered to cover outplacement service costs for one month after employment ends to help dismissed staff with their résumés and job-search strategies.

InterVarsity's written policy is an admirable reaffirmation of fidelity to orthodox Christian teachings on sexuality and marriage. I am grateful for the parachurch ministry's faithful witness. But proponents of the new morality and "gender progressivism," as I heard IRD board member Dr. Graham Walker characterize it, will unleash a tyrannical backlash. InterVarsity is already receiving hostile blowback.

In the days to come InterVarsity will be under tremendous pressure to apologize and reverse their position. However, this isn't solely an InterVarsity problem.



Students pray during an InterVarsity gathering at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia. (Photo: Roanoke College/Wikimedia Commons)

One astute InterVarsity staff member I follow on social media tweeted, "dealing w/ this issue is 100% coming for *every* parachurch ministry eventually. Cru, Navs [Navigators], Young Life, etc. Buckle up."

Indeed, the crushing pressure for Christian ministries, small business owners, and individuals to capitulate to a hostile culture where sexuality and marriage have no boundaries is intense and increasing. Mark Tooley, President of the IRD, previously stated, "All traditional Christian groups operating in the current Zeitgeist face an impending Winter of secularist hostility. But religious groups that surrender their core convictions almost always are diminished and become irrelevant."

Now is the moment InterVarsity deserves our gratitude and support. Whether through your phone calls of encouragement, financial support of their campus ministry, or your prayers for staff navigating the expected fallout, please let InterVarsity know their brothers and sisters in Christ appreciate their faithfulness.

May God bless InterVarsity's witness and ministry to over 40,000 students across 667 campuses across America. ✝



Chelsen Vicari directs the Evangelical Action program at the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

Americans' Top Criterion for Finding a New Church

by Joseph Rossell

Searching for a new church is a common experience for Americans. Nearly half have done so at least once in their life and a quarter have done so within the last five years, according to a new study by Pew Religion. But why do they leave and why do they decide where to attend?

Pew found that Americans changed churches or places of worship for a variety of reasons. The most common reason was because they moved (34%), got divorced (11%), or for other pragmatic reasons (3%). Ideological reasons were also frequently cited, including disagreements with clergy (11%) and changes in beliefs (5%).

Perhaps even more insightfully, Pew asked what characteristics played an “important role” in picking a new church. Respondents cited four major reasons: quality of the sermons (83%), feeling welcomed by the church’s leaders (79%), the



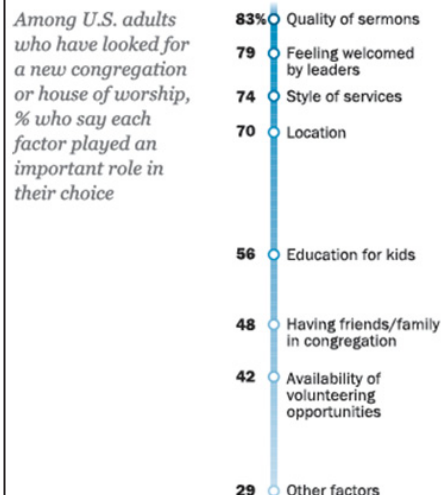
(Photo: Pixabay)

style of the worship services (74%), and the location of the church (70%).

Three more reasons ranked lower, but were still mentioned by nearly half of respondents: resources for children to receive instruction (56%), connecting with friends and family (48%), service opportunities (42%).

Sermon quality was particularly important for Protestant church seekers

When searching for a new congregation, Americans value quality of sermons and feeling welcomed



Note: Based on those who have searched for a new house of worship. Source: 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study recontact survey conducted March 17-May 6, 2015. QC5a-h. “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship”

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(92%), especially evangelicals (94%). Interestingly, this was also most important for atheists and agnostics (76%) when seeking a new faith community.

Other faith traditions emphasized different reasons for picking a new place of worship. Location was the most important factor for Catholics; 76% of Catholics named it as their most significant consideration. Religious “nones” and individuals from non-Christian faiths said that the style of worship ranked as their highest concern.

Pew broke this data down as shown in the table at left.

Unsurprisingly, the decision-making process usually involved visiting a new church for the vast majority of seekers (85%). Most also based their decision on interacting with members (69%), the recommendation of a friend or coworker (68%), and talking to clergy (55%). This

Continued on page 4

Quality sermons and feeling welcome are crucial to finding new house of worship

Among U.S. adults who have looked for a new congregation or house of worship, % who say each factor played an important role in their choice

	Quality of sermons	Feeling welcomed by leaders	Style of worship services	Location	Religious education for kids	Having friends/family in congregation	Volunteering opportunities	Other factors
Total	83	79	74	70	56	48	42	29
All affiliated	84	80	75	72	58	49	43	30
Christian	85	80	74	72	58	49	44	30
Protestant	92	84	79	71	62	51	47	31
Evangelical	94	83	80	69	64	49	49	34
Mainline	87	86	78	76	54	53	40	26
Historically black	92	81	76	62	69	52	59	32
Catholic	67	71	63	76	51	45	36	22
Non-Christian faiths	73	76	79	77	50	50	30	28
Unaffiliated	75	71	73	61	41	45	36	24
Atheist/agnostic	76	66	71	62	33	50	35	22
Nothing in particular	74	73	74	60	44	43	36	24
Attend monthly or more	87	80	74	71	61	48	47	32
Attend less often	76	75	75	69	46	49	33	23

Source: 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study recontact survey conducted March 17-May 6, 2015. QC5a-h. “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship”

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Joseph Rossell serves as Research Analyst at IRD.

Nude Female 'Christa' Back at Episcopal Cathedral

by Jeff Walton

A controversial sculpture depicting a nude female Christ on the cross has returned to New York's Episcopal Cathedral, displayed on a chapel altar.

"Christa," the bronze sculpture by artist Edwina Sandys, appears alongside the work of 21 other contemporary artists, according to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine web site: "all exploring the language, symbolism, art, and ritual associated with the historic concept of the Christ image and the divine as manifested in every person—across all genders, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and abilities."

Sandys' work was previously exhibited in the cathedral in 1984 as part of an exhibition on the feminine divine, but was removed after significant backlash. Then-Suffragan Bishop of New York Walter Dennis criticized the sculpture as "theologically and historically indefensible" leading to its removal from the 124-year-old gothic revival church in Manhattan's Morningside Heights neighborhood.

The *New York Times* reports that "Christa" is being installed on the altar in the Chapel of St. Saviour, one of seven chapels radiating from the ambulatory behind the choir. In marking the return of the sculpture, Sandys is joined by

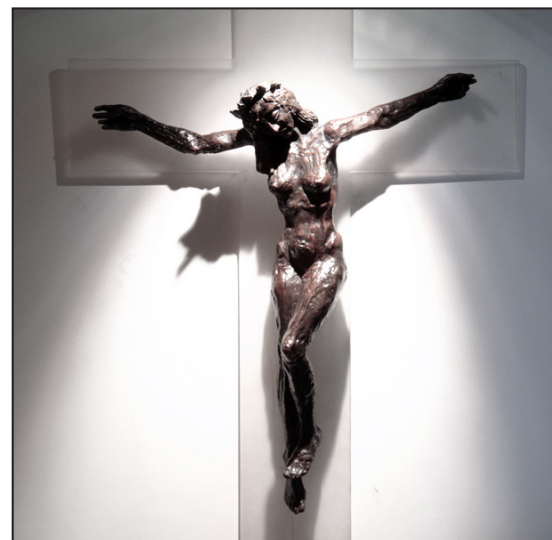
cathedral and diocesan officials in assessing that "Times have changed":

The current dean of the cathedral, the Very Rev. James A. Kowalski, saw the return of the statue as "an opportunity to reframe the conversation and, frankly, do a better job than the first time."

And this time, the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, Andrew M. L. Dietsche, wrote an article for the cathedral's booklet—an approving article. "In an evolving, growing, learning church," he wrote, "we may be ready to see 'Christa' not only as a work of art but as an object of devotion, over our altar, with all of the challenges that may come with that for many visitors to the cathedral, or indeed, perhaps for all of us."

Looking back, Dean Kowalski noted that the statue's first appearance at the cathedral was long before national debates over such topics as transgender people's right to use the bathroom of their choice.

Readers may recall Kowalski as the previous chair of the Board of Trustees for Episcopal Divinity School, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based progressive Episcopal Church seminary that recently voted to cease issuing academic degrees.



"Christa," the 1975 bronze sculpture by artist Edwina Sandys, is credited as being the first representation of a female Christ on a cross. (Photo: Edwina Sandys)

The school sold much of its property in the past decade and is burning through nearly eight million dollars a year from its endowment, an unsustainable level of spending.

Episcopalians in New York State have been hard-hit by membership and attendance decline, with the Diocese of New York reporting significant losses in the past decade.

Between 2005 and 2015, the Episcopal Diocese of New York declined from 64,027 members to 53,353 members, a loss of 10,674 members (-17%). During the same time period, average Sunday attendance dropped from 21,723 in 2005 to 16,878 in 2015, a loss of 4,845 attendees (-22%). Baptisms in the diocese declined from 1,612 in 2005 to 904 in 2015 (-56%) and marriages performed decreased from 579 in 2005 to 290 in 2015 (-50%).

The exhibit will run through March 12. ✚

Ravi Zacharias on Our Divided Moment

Continued from page 10

Zacharias read from Minnie Haskins' 1908 poem "The Gate of the Year," which King George VI read to a terrified nation soon after the outbreak of World War II:

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be

better than light, and safer than a known way."

"I say to you now, those simple words need to stand tall in your thinking and mine," Zacharias insisted. "Put your hand into the hand of God by surrendering your own heart to him and walk out into the darkness: it shall be to you better than the light, and safer than the known."

"The answer will come with your hand in God's hand." ✚



Jeffrey H. Walton is the Communications Manager and Anglican Program Director at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

PCUSA Official Spreads Divisive Post-Election Discourse

by Peter Johnson

The newly selected top official of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, recently released a statement about the



J. Herbert Nelson, now Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), preaches at the weekly chapel service in the United Methodist Building, Simpson Memorial Chapel, in Washington, D.C., on March 11, 2015. (Photo: PC(USA) Office of Public Witness)

presidential election entitled, “When Incivility Becomes the Norm.”

The PCUSA Stated Clerk characterized his missive as a “response to the violence on America’s streets after the election of Mr. Donald Trump as President-Elect of the United States of America.” One might think, upon reading this introduction, that Nelson would be making an appeal for peace and calm. After all, peaceful protests are a proud legacy of the church, while violence and riots are generally discouraged by Christians.

Unfortunately, Nelson failed to discourage the violent protests even once in his 2000+ word letter (replete with seven footnotes). Instead, he declared his hope that the protests would pave the way for a particular public policy agenda that he favors.

Nelson concedes that “President-Elect Trump is our newly elected leader,” but also characterizes the election as undemocratic and rigged by corporate interests. He also exhorts churches to undermine a not-yet-formulated immigration policy of the President-elect by harboring deportees in their “basements.”

The only instances where Nelson explicitly mentions violence is when he links Trump to an imagined future violence: “pain, suffering, and yes, death, which will be wrought by the promised policies of the incoming administration.”

At the heart of the letter is Nelson’s vision for “coalition building and community organizing, [where] we have an opportunity to create a vision of shared prosperity, safety, dignity, and justice that is truly inclusive and compelling to a broad base.”

The irony is completely lost on the PCUSA leader that a church that fails to be compelling to its own congregants—as evidenced by the steady exodus from the denomination—is now dispensing advice on how to grow a winning constituent base in politics. The denomination is becoming a parody of itself. The popular Christian satire publication *Babylon Bee* couldn’t write a better headline!

But perhaps the height of irony is that the maligned President-elect was baptized in the PCUSA and claimed to be affiliated with the denomination early in his campaign. The PCUSA could have used Trump’s declaration as an opportunity to demonstrate the sort of grace and benevolence that Christ demonstrated to all sinners. Instead the PCUSA explored

whether or not they could remove him from their rolls (he had no active membership anywhere, so they were not able to revoke it).

The saddest part of this letter is that many Presbyterians, myself included, wish the divisiveness and animosity directed toward Trump was restricted to our most brash and notorious political leaders. Unfortunately, it is not. It has been a little more than a year since the Presbyter from the local Presbytery came into my small PCUSA church in Michigan to publicly dismiss the pastor during a Sunday service and also invite all those in attendance who were unhappy with this decision to kindly leave.

My pastor’s transgression? He held certain scripturally based opinions that had, of late, gone out of style in the PCUSA.

Unfortunately, my experience is not uncommon. The majority of my old congregation and the pastor have since regrouped under the banner of the new Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO). And while we don’t all agree on politics, we have learned a valuable lesson: Why worry about a *speck* in your friend’s eye when you have a *log* in your own?

If the tenor of the election has taught us anything, it is that Christian ideals are needed in our public discourse now more than ever before. As long as Christian leaders, like those in the PCUSA, continue to impugn half of the electorate while encouraging violent protests from others, the church will be appear as divided and hopeless as the electorate itself. ✚



Peter Johnson serves as External Relations Officer at the Action Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

LGBTQ Activities Disrupt UMC Bishops' Meeting

by Joseph Rossell



LGBTQ activist and General Conference delegate Dr. Dorothee Benz reads a statement via megaphone from the group Love Prevails during the United Methodist Church Council of Bishops meeting on November 1, 2016. (Photo: Love Prevails streaming video/Facebook)

LGBTQ activists disrupted a closed-door meeting of United Methodist bishops to protest perceived discrimination against them within the denomination. Their protests included confronting bishops with signs, driving around the convention center blaring 1970s pop group Abba's "Dancing Queen" with the windows down, and taking over the bishops' meeting space where they reasserted their demands with a megaphone.

Members of Love Prevails, a group that works to assert a progressive LGBTQ agenda in the United Methodist Church (UMC), protested during the meeting of the Council of Bishops (COB), held earlier this autumn at St. Simons Island, Georgia. They alleged that LGBTQ voices were underrepresented on the Commission on Human Sexuality. The COB announced the

list of individuals it had appointed to the commission on October 24.

IRD United Methodist Director John Lomperis observed in his analysis of the Human Sexuality Commission, published last October, that LGBTQ Methodists had already acquired more than proportional representation on the commission. "Considering that likely no more than two percent of United Methodists (if that) self-identify as LGBTQ, this rather tiny demographic getting three out of 32 slots (nearly 10 percent) is quite an over-representation," Lomperis wrote.

However, Love Prevails "demand[ed] a full majority" on the commission in July. Dr. Dorothee Benz—communications director at the Center for Constitutional Rights, self-identified lesbian LGBTQ activist, and General Conference delegate—repeated this demand while reading a statement via megaphone during the bishops' meeting on November 1. She said the group had called on the COB to respond by 8 a.m. that morning, but the bishops had failed to do so. She said that was "why we are here, again, now."

"We began and ended by reiterating the demand, the urgent need for the COB to act with grace and admit its grievous mistake in how it has constituted this commission and to re-constitute it to include 50% LGBTQI people, whereby

those people must represent the full, diverse spectrum of our communities, specifically, including people of color and women," Benz said in the statement, as posted to the website of the Reconciling Ministries Network.

COB President Bishop Bruce Ough failed to stop the disruption. This resembled his easygoing response to disruptions at Connectional Table (CT), which he chaired from 2013 through 2016. Lomperis reported that Bishop Ough had also made a point of "crediting Love Prevails with pressuring the CT" through these disruptions "to dramatically re-order its agenda" around human sexuality.

A 14-minute video of Benz reading her statement and the ongoing disruption of the Council meeting by LGBTQ activists was streamed live on Facebook by Love Prevails. It was still available for viewing at press time.

The video also shows numerous bishops leaving the meeting. Former Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) Executive Director Chett Pritchett took to Twitter, challenging Methodists whose bishops walked out to "HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE!"

Since her disruption on November 1, Benz has continued to voice her criticisms of the COB on Twitter. In one tweet on November 2, she said she was "proud" to have represented Methodist LGBTQ activists at the COB meeting. ✚



Joseph Rossell serves as Research Analyst at IRD.

IRD Diary: An Open Letter to the President-Elect: Pressure Pakistan to Release Asia Bibi

Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, was sentenced to death for blasphemy after a dispute with her Muslim coworkers. She drank from the same water source they did.

Dear President-elect Trump,

Congratulations on winning the election. We are praying for the success of your administration in bringing restoration and renewal of democracy, freedom, and prosperity to the United States, and in taking leadership in critical global issues.

Your recent phone call with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been widely reported in the media. In a statement released by Pakistan's Press Information Department, you were quoted as telling Prime Minister Sharif, "I am ready and willing to play any role that you want me to play to address and find solutions to the outstanding problems."

Mr. President-elect, we appreciate your desire to work on outstanding problems in Pakistan. From our perspective and in the belief of millions who helped you to win the election, one of those issues is Pakistan's unjust blasphemy law. This law prescribes the death penalty for blasphemy against the Muslim prophet Muhammad and the Islamic faith, as well as for the desecration of the Quran. Christians, other religious minorities in Pakistan, and even Muslims have suffered unimaginable and egregious violations of human rights because of this law.

In addition to the initial problem—that such a law violates universal standards of religious freedom, freedom of speech, etc.—the law is used in a capricious and malicious manner. Accusations of "blasphemy" are most often untrue and no more than a

means to inflict harm on a business rival, seize coveted property, or punish someone for being a Christian. But once the accusation is made, the Islamist fervor is ignited. Mobs try to kill anyone associated with the accused person and are known for destroying whole communities of vulnerable Christians. Many accused of blasphemy are never convicted, but are



Photo: iStockphoto and Flickr/kaplo, via The Stream.

killed nevertheless, by jihadist mobs.

Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, is one victim of this law. Her case, in our opinion, epitomizes what is wrong with Pakistan's blasphemy law. In June 2009, Mrs. Bibi was accused of blasphemy against the Muslim prophet Muhammad following a dispute with her Muslim coworkers. The argument started because Asia Bibi, a lowly Christian, dared to drink from the same water source as the Muslims. (Christians are treated as second-class citizens in such communities that are dominated by Islam.)

Mrs. Bibi was sentenced to death in November 2010, making her the first woman in Pakistan to face capital punishment for blasphemy. This outrageous verdict was condemned by thousands around the world, including high ranking Pakistani government officials. The Muslim governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, a courageous defender of human rights for people of all faiths, was a vocal critic of

the unjust punishment meted out on Asia Bibi. On January 4, 2011, Governor Taseer was brutally murdered by his own security guard for his advocacy for the Christian woman. And on March 2, 2011, Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's only Christian state-level minister, was gunned down for defending Asia Bibi. His assassination had been preceded by death threats because Bhatti called for reforming Pakistan's blasphemy law.

President-elect Trump, we understand the complexity of dealing with the blasphemy law in Pakistan. But we also know that your administration can take some practical steps to pressure Pakistan to release Asia Bibi and others imprisoned because of this law.

We urge you, Mr. President-elect, to make pressuring Pakistan to abolish its blasphemy law a matter of priority. The law has emboldened religious extremists and has become a source of constant terror against millions of religious minorities and others in the country.

May God bless you as you build your team and prepare to lead our nation.

With best wishes,

Faith J. H. McDonnell
and Darara Gubo

Faith J. H. McDonnell directs IRD's Religious Liberty Program and Church Alliance for a New Sudan

Dr. Darara Gubo is a human rights activist working on behalf of the persecuted church, and is the author of Blasphemy and Defamation of Religions in a Polarized World: How Religious Fundamentalism Is Challenging Fundamental Human Rights.



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