

# faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Christmas 2017



## Evangelical Women in Public Policy and Public Witness

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Clergy gather to bless the Preterm abortion clinic in Cleveland, Ohio, in October 2015. (Photo: Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice) See page 4.

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Cover Photo: On November 2, IRD's Evangelical Action Program hosted a panel of rising young evangelical women leaders working in the field of public policy. Left to right: Patriona Mosley, Bethany Goodman, Rebecca Gonzales, Alison Howard Centofante, Chelsen Vicari (at podium).

# Removing George Washington

**C**hrist Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia, whose beautiful Christmas Eve services I traditionally attend, is one of the great places in America. Nearly 250 years old, **George Washington** as parish vestryman facilitated its construction and was later a regular worshiper. Later still, **Robert E. Lee** was a nearly lifelong parishioner. He was baptized and confirmed there in middle age after a personal religious rebirth. His daughter left the church a large endowment. Washington himself bequeathed the church a Bible.

The church has announced it is relocating out of the sanctuary two nearly 150-year-old marble plaques that memorialize its two most famous parishioners, [explaining](#):

“The plaques in our sanctuary make some in our presence feel unsafe or unwelcome. Some visitors and guests who worship with us choose not to return because they receive an unintended message from the prominent presence of the plaques. Many in our congregation feel a strong need for the church to stand clearly on the side of ‘All are welcome—no exceptions.’”

Count me skeptical that Christ Church loses potential members over the plaques. Likelier the ties to Washington and Lee attract tourists and other visitors who wouldn't otherwise attend. As a child, every time we drove by, my parents or grandparents pointed it out as Washington's church, which is central if not primary to its identity. Like most other Episcopal congregations, it is in decline, having [lost 25 percent of its average worship size](#) in the past decade. But it's still the largest Episcopal congregation in Northern Virginia.

Over the last 14 years the Episcopal Church has suffered a nationwide schism since electing an openly homosexual bishop. Some conservative congregations, including several in Northern Virginia, left the denomination to create the new Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). Another church Washington helped govern at the same time as Christ Church was [The Falls Church](#), whose congregation joined ACNA. It lost its historic property in litigation to the Episcopal Church but continues to thrive while meeting in a Catholic high school auditorium. It has even [planted](#) several successful new churches.

Christ Church remained in the Episcopal Church and has headed in a more liberal direction. One Christmas Eve sermon I heard got political. And in recent years the church has hosted a labyrinth, advertised by a large banner outside the church to passing commuters. This arguably New Age fad is popular in some liberal Protestant churches. Neither Washington nor Lee, if alive today, would likely walk the labyrinth.

I mention the political sermon, the labyrinth, and support for same-sex marriage because they could all be interpreted as

unwelcoming signals to potential worshipers who don't share Christ Church's form of Episcopal liberalism. This kind of church invariably attracts a demographic that is nearly all middle and upper class, educated, socially liberal urban white people. Churches that stress their welcome-welcome-welcome message of inclusion over a firm orthodox theological message typically are, whether realizing it or not, actually welcoming some and discouraging others. In my visits to Christ Church I have noticed the well-dressed congregation is not very diverse. Removing the Washington and Lee plaques will not likely expand its demographic.

On Christmas Eve I almost always arrive early at Christ Church and sit in the Washington family box. **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** and **Winston Churchill** with **Eleanor Roosevelt** sat there on New Year's Day 1942 and heard the sermon regret America's sinful isolationism before Pearl Harbor while praying for victory against Nazi and Japanese militarist aggression. Churchill wept as the congregation sang “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” FDR chose the church because of its ties to Washington, whose Mount Vernon they visited after worship. Churchill admired both Washington and Lee.

Churchill and FDR, with Washington and Lee, were sinful men and instruments of Providence. Their stories merit examination and often admiration, not Manichean caricatures. Lee's faith failed to make him an abolitionist but it did guide his gracious surrender and support for peace with reconciliation. Washington's faith almost certainly guided him toward opposition to slavery and emancipation for his own slaves. Christianity, based on the example of St. Paul, usually judges lives based on their trajectory and conclusion, not the sins of earlier life.

Publicity over Christ Church's plaque removal guided me to a magnificent eulogy of Washington by Bishop **Richard Allen**, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who bought himself out of slavery and quit a segregated Methodist Church to create the first great black denomination. Allen experienced the worst of slavery, as his own mother and siblings were sold

*Continued on page 15*

*Mark Tooley*



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

## ‘Man of Passion’ Nabeel Qureshi (1983–2017) Remembered

Thousands commemorated the late Christian author and evangelist **Nabeel Qureshi** on September 21, 2017, during his funeral. Qureshi, a former Muslim who converted to Christianity, passed away in September at age 34 after a year-long battle with stomach cancer.

Hundreds attended the moving service in person at First Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. In addition, many viewers—more than 14,000 simultaneously at one point—watched online. Many of those were among the thousands who had heard Qureshi share his testimony in person, or hundreds of thousands who read his bestselling books *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* and *No God but One*.

Evangelist **Ravi Zacharias** recalled his young colleague as “not only a man

of conviction” but “a man of passion.” Qureshi served alongside Zacharias for more than four years at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, speaking about Christian apologetics around the world. Zacharias recalled firsthand examples of the countless lives that Qureshi had touched through his ministry.

“You see, to him [Nabeel] the grace of Jesus Christ through the Cross of Christ was the most remarkable truth that he wanted to carry to the world,” Zacharias explained. “And once his blindness was gone he understood that.”

Zacharias affirmed that his friend’s “pain is now over” in a *Washington Post* obituary that he penned. Zacharias added: “I do not mourn for him. I mourn for our broken world, where so much hate and destruction abounds.”



Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias speaks at Nabeel Qureshi's funeral. (Photo: screen capture)

During his battle with cancer, Qureshi's faith in God **remained steadfast**. His greatest concern remained for his non-Christian relatives, and for his young daughter having to grow up without a father.

Qureshi **gave a talk while undergoing radiation**, emblematic of his Christ-centered perspective, as he grappled with issues of life, death, and immortality. He combined elements of hope and trust in God's ultimate purposes, while pointing his listeners back to the cross.

“I think about what Jesus went through for us on the Cross,” Qureshi shared. “When I start feeling self-pity, and I starting thinking, ‘What is happening to me,’ I just turn my eyes to Jesus. I say, ‘Jesus, what you did for me on the Cross far outweighs anything I'm going through right now.’” ✝

## Clergy ‘Bless’ Texas Abortion Clinic, Say Abortion a ‘God-Given Right’

A group of liberal clergy gathered at a Fort Worth, Texas, abortion clinic in November to “bless” its staff and patients, sing “Hallelujah,” and support abortion as a woman’s “God-given right.”

The *Texas Observer* reports that liberal clergy organized by the **Religious InSTITUTE** gathered November 9 to pray for God's

blessings over the abortion clinic and counter the narrative that “Anti-abortion advocacy is often inextricably tied to religion.”

The pro-abortion prayer event was organized by **Kentina Washington-Leapheart**, a minister who earned her Master of Divinity degree from the United Methodist-affiliated Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and who is director of programs for reproductive justice and sexuality education at the Religious InSTITUTE.

“We're trying say [the extreme right's] narrative isn't the only narrative related to faith,” Washington-Leapheart told the *Texas Observer*. “Women seeking an abortion are largely women of faith. They're not

having an abortion in spite of their faith, it's in many ways informing the decision they make ... They have a God-given right to make decisions about their life.”

The Religious InSTITUTE is a Connecticut-based interfaith advocacy group co-founded by Unitarian Universalist Minister and sexologist **Debra Haffner**. The organization's stated purpose is to advocate for “sexual health, education, and justice in faith communities and society.” The organization touts some 8,500 participating religious leaders from over 70 faith traditions.

The Religious InSTITUTE's **website** provides clergy with “Scriptural reflections, sermon starters, and exegesis” that allegedly certify abortion and unorthodox Christian sexual ethics as reconciled by God. A search of “reproductive justice” issues in the website's database revealed 28 Scripture verses purportedly affirming abortion as a “God-given right.” ✝



Clergy gather to bless the Preterm abortion clinic in Cleveland, Ohio, in October 2015. (Photo: Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice)

## Sudan Church Demolition Draws State Department Ire

The *Christian Post* reports a high-ranking U.S. State Department official's demands that the Sudanese government put an end to the systematic confiscation and demolition of churches and mosques.

In a November speech in Sudan's second largest city, visiting Deputy U.S. Secretary of State **John Sullivan** charged that in order for relations between the oppressive nation and the United States to improve, the country must do a better job of protecting free speech and religious expression.

"The government of Sudan, including the federal states, should also immediately suspend demolition of places of worship, including mosques and churches," global news service [AFP](#) quoted Sullivan



Workers tear down a church building in Omdurman, Sudan, in 2014. (Photo: *Morning Star News*)

as saying in a speech at Al-Koran Al-Karim University in Omdurman.

Sudan ranks as the fifth-worst country in the world when it comes to Christian persecution, according to [Open Doors USA](#). Its government has arrested Christians who refused to give up control of their church properties to the government. A number of the churches in question have been destroyed by the government.

According to [World Watch Monitor](#), Sullivan explained that the 2017 State Department International Religious Freedom report highlighted "instances of the arrest, detention, and intimidation of

religious leaders," as well as "the denial of permits for the construction of new churches; restrictions on non-Muslim religious groups from entering the country; and the censorship of religious material."

In October, five [Christian leaders were arrested](#) because of their refusal to give over control of the church. In August, seven other Christian leaders were detained.

Sullivan's visit comes as the Trump administration [formally lifted two-decade](#)

[old economic sanctions](#) against Sudan last month, a [move that was criticized](#) by many.

Human rights and religious freedom advocates have long called out Sudan for its poor human rights record under President **Omar al-Bashir**. Activists have accused Sudanese authorities of not only detaining pastors and religious leaders but also political dissidents, human rights activists, and journalists. ✚

## New Report Sheds Light on North Korea Horror

A new report on North Korea is demonstrating the link between global/national security and human rights.

*From Cradle to Grave: The Path of North Korean Innocents*, documents how **Kim Jong-un's** prison camps are a tool of political oppression and are used to control North Korean citizens. The Kim regime's strategy for survival, the report says, is based on "ensuring the complete loyalty of the people to the Supreme Leader."

Issued in November by The [Committee on Human Rights in North Korea \(HRNK\)](#), the report "documents the chain of political and administrative command and control responsible for crimes against humanity in North Korea."

The authors seek to expose how many "innocent" North Koreans—guilty only by association—suffer and die in the prison camps. The report identifies those

responsible for torturing and killing both political prisoners and innocents arrested with them.

Three generations of families are imprisoned with the "guilty." It is HRNK's hope that evidence in the report will one day lead to the convictions of those responsible. Tens of thousands of North Koreans are believed to die in prison camps each year, and satellite imagery documents activity in and expansion of the camps.

Speaking at the launch, **Nicholas Eberstadt** of the American Enterprise Institute said that "human rights is the flip side of the coin from North Korea's behavior internationally .... What North Korea wants to do to us is what they do every day to the people in the DPRK," Eberstadt declared. ✚

*Prisoners are forced into back-breaking labor seven days a week in North Korean prison camps. (Photo: Daily Mirror)*



# Episcopal Church Still Skidding Downhill

by Jeffrey Walton



**E**piscopalians have yet to hit bottom in their downward membership spiral that began in the early 2000s.

Updated statistics made available this autumn by the Episcopal Church General Convention Office show a denomination continuing a sustained decline in 2016 to 1,745,156 domestic members. The U.S.-based denomination shed 34,179 members, a decline of 1.9 percent, while attendance losses were relatively limited compared to previous years, declining 9,327, down 1.6 percent.

Among dioceses facing the largest declines is Eastern Michigan, which dropped 14.7 percent from 5,888 down to 5,022 members (-866). The diocese also saw a 3.5 percent drop in Average Sunday Attendance (ASA), down to 1,922 attendees.

The diocese's past bishop, **Todd Ousley**, recently joined the staff of Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop **Michael Curry** to serve as bishop for pastoral development after 16 years serving in Michigan. In a letter to the diocese, the local standing committee wrote about its decision to pursue a provisional bishop rather than seek a new diocesan bishop to replace Ousley.

The committee cited among manifold reasons: "budget realities, decreasing and emerging populations, and cultural trends away from church-attendance and religious life."

The nearby Diocese of Western Michigan also took a sizeable hit, dropping 10.4 percent from 9,675 down to 8,668 members (-1,007). The diocese also saw a 4 percent drop in ASA, down to 3,491 attendees.

Episcopal Church officials have been aware of the negative trends for some

time. In March, Bishop **Mariann Budde** of the Diocese of Washington gave a sermon at the spring House of Bishops meeting in which she broached the subject of ongoing decline.

"I live in a perpetual state of holy urgency about the spiritual health and ministry capacity of the congregations I serve and those I hope to establish on my watch," Budde shared with her Episcopal colleagues. "Looking deeply at the trends and internal realities of each [congregation], only 12 of them, at most, are on a path of sustainability and growth; another 12-15, at the other extreme, are in precipitous decline—most of them in our most vulnerable or rapidly transitioning neighborhoods or communities. The rest, despite working as hard as they can, will most likely be, without some intervention

or significant change, almost exactly where they are now 10 years from now in terms of size and capacity for ministry—this in a part of the country that is experiencing significant population growth and where other expressions of the Christian faith are thriving. I can't bring myself to count the number of congregations I cannot, in good conscience, recommend to those who are seeking a vibrant expression of Christian community."

In a reference to Presiding Bishop Curry's embrace of the language of "the Jesus Movement," Budde provocatively offered, "There's no doubt in my mind that the Jesus Movement is alive and well in the Diocese of Washington. I cannot say the same about the Episcopal

branch of the Jesus Movement in all of its expressions."

While the Diocese of Washington lost more than 1,000 members in 2016, its relatively large size meant it only shed 2.6 percent of members, and nudged up attendance of 1.8 percent.

Among those congregations facing precipitous decline in Budde's diocese is the congregation of retired Bishop **Gene Robinson**, who famously contributed to the Episcopal Church schism with his consecration as an openly partnered gay man to be Bishop of New Hampshire. Robinson has served several years now as "bishop-in-residence" at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in the Dupont Circle neighborhood of Washington, D.C., where he relocated as a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank. Robinson's parish will, as part of a property redevelopment, feature an eponymous chapel that he has proposed be a pilgrimage site for youth who identify as LGBT.

Even though the District of Columbia population has grown 16 percent from 2006-2016, St. Thomas has declined steeply in the past five years, shrinking from 350 to 140 members (-60%) and from a weekly attendance of 150 down to 75 (-50%). The congregation's priest-in-charge, **Alex Dyer**, cited the ongoing construction of a new church sanctuary and a purge of parish membership rolls as contributing factors. Asked about the decline in attendance, Dyer commented via Twitter: "ASA is one measure. @StThomasDC is one of the most best parishes I have served. Check back in 5 years and the story will be different." ✚

Episcopal Church domestic dioceses posting large membership declines include:

- Virgin Islands (-10%)
- Georgia (-7.5%)
- New Hampshire (-6%)
- Vermont (-6.4%)
- Albany (-5.1%)
- New Jersey (-6.1%)
- Western New York (-10.6%)
- Central Pennsylvania (-5.6%)
- Milwaukee (-6.9%)
- Fond Du Lac (-5.3%)
- Iowa (-8.5%)
- Northwest Texas (-8.6%)
- Spokane (-8.1%)



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

# Joseph and the Transgender Dreamcoat

by Chelsen Vicari

LGBTQ activists within the Church have long produced stories deliberately twisting the sexual orientation of biblical characters to fit their revisionist campaign. I thought I'd heard them all: David and Jonathan, Daniel and the palace master, and even Ruth and Naomi. But I hadn't yet heard of a transgender character in the Bible. Have you?

So I was struck by a [blog post](#) published by the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), a major pro-LGBTQ coalition active in the United Methodist Church. A "genderqueer" RMN blogger presents an altered story of Joseph and the coat of many colors. In this new interpretation, Joseph's coat is not a colorful robe, but a "princess dress," possibly making him transgender. The blogger, **Mac Buff**, contends:

[W]e no longer know the precise meaning of the word usually translated "coat of many colors," but the only other time it's used is to describe the clothing of a king's virginal daughter. A princess dress.

Which opens the possibility that Joseph could have been, instead of an arrogant little twerp spoiled by his father, a transgender kid just trying to survive in the family.

Read [Genesis 37:1-36](#) for Scripture's account of Joseph and his colorful robe.

As to the blogger's assertion Joseph was possibly transgender, the argument is deeply problematic. For starters, the author offers no evidence to support the claim that the translation of "coat of many colors" is questionable. Second, Scripture tells us the garment was a gift from Joseph's father. Would Jacob have given his beloved son a princess dress? Probably not. Scripture also tells us Joseph's brothers were jealous of their father's special affection for Joseph. It's doubtful all the brothers coveted a gift from their father that encouraged cross-dressing.

None of these details really matter, as the author admits later on. The point is not whether or not the blogger's exegesis holds true. There's a bigger picture here we need to see.



The blogger's goal is to reposition the framework of Joseph's story around gender identity as the substance of redemption, instead of God's grace and guiding providence.

Determined to prove why a genderqueer interpretation of Scripture is necessary, the blogger explains:

If Joseph wore a princess dress, then for the first time, I see someone in our holy Scripture who is like me. Someone who bends—or even breaks—the expectations of gender. I can read the story of my faith tradition, the story of my Savior, and see in it the radical possibility that God loves even me. Because God has done it before. God loved and protected Joseph even through hardship.

Before you dismiss these writings as "just a blog," consider why the distortions should not be taken lightly.

The motivating factors for this argument are pain, confusion, and deceit that should grieve faithful Christians to the core.

Satan has successfully broken down traditional sexual boundaries. Satan has done an even better job erasing the concept of sin within Western Christianity. Instead of transformation through the cross of Christ, emphasis for the faith is placed on personal feelings and self-identity. But only harm comes from prioritizing flawed human nature instead of the cross of Christ.

So pervasive are the arguments for revisionist sexual ethics that they are extending beyond secular culture, beyond the usual Religious Left circles and into orthodox Christian communities. Evangelical kids, for example, hear these kinds of twisted interpretations that turn their sin struggle into a unique characteristic, something to be celebrated. It dismisses sin, tears down limitations and the onus for believers to die to ourselves and find our identities in Christ.

The RMN blogger does get one point absolutely right. God does love them. But his love is not based on their age, hair color, skin color, gender, or any other self-identity. God loves you because he created you, his child, in his image.

Even if Joseph wasn't transgender, he wasn't without sin. The Bible is filled with the stories of flawed identities: David the adulterer, Moses the murderer, Saul the persecutor. Each one was created in the image of their Creator. Each one is deeply loved by him. Each one's identity is found anew in him. We give thanks their stories point to the One whose grace is the substance of redemption, not their own sinful identities. ✚



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

## Addressing Evangelical Women's Public Witness

Transcribed by Morgan Nelson

Above, left to right: Patrina Mosley, Bethany Goodman, Christen Vicari, Alison Howard Centofante, and Rebecca Gonzales led a wide-ranging panel discussion of evangelical public policies.

On November 2, IRD's Evangelical Action Program hosted a panel of rising young evangelical women leaders working in the field of public policy. Printed here are excerpts from each address, which can be viewed in full on the IRD web site at: [www.TheIRD.org/Evangelical](http://www.TheIRD.org/Evangelical)

**Chelsen Vicari** is the *Evangelical Action Program Director, IRD*.

I'm a wife, mother of precious 4-month-old baby girl, and I have been on staff as the director of IRD's Evangelical program since 2013. Since I started, this gathering of Evangelical women for training and discussion has been a vision of mine.

It's our hope that this gathering is the start of much-needed coalition building and training specifically for Evangelical women working in advocacy, ministry, and public policy.

Over the years, the IRD has watched mournfully as many mainline Protestant churches—such as the Episcopal Church and Presbyterian Church (USA)—lost their cultural legitimacy in America. They did so by either remaining silent or totally revising their doctrine on Christian

sexual ethics to appease cultural elites. These once-influential churches failed to bear witness to Christ and his commands. The result is dwindling congregations and nearly non-existent evangelism.

Now the IRD is monitoring a growing cultural conformity among many Evangelicals, largely prompted by feelings and concern over secular perceptions. But revising Christian teaching has already been tried. And as we've seen with many of the Mainline Protestant denominations, these attempts ultimately fail to spread the Gospel.

The warning signs are there, but many popular Evangelical and post-Evangelical women and men aren't paying attention.

Perhaps you've noticed some in your church are starting to affirm same-sex marriage as "loving." Or you've noticed some Christian thinkers placing scare quotes around the term "religious freedom" and referring to a "Christian persecution complex." Or maybe you're simply unsure as to why Christians support Israel

or should promote the human rights of a baby in utero.

Some might accuse us of culture warring, but to remain silent is to forfeit a credible public Christian witness. As I recently heard distinguished Catholic Philosopher **Robert P. George** say, "Let us have the courage to speak the truth in love and out loud."

We pray this gathering—and hopefully those to follow—will offer clarity and practical help in "making a defense" for innocent life, Christian sexual ethics, and religious freedom at home and abroad. Above all, we

wish to encourage you with the knowledge that you don't face these challenges alone.

**Alison Howard Centofante** serves as the *Director of Alliance Relations at Alliance Defending Freedom*, which works to serve, strengthen, and expand the Alliance on life, marriage, and religious freedom.

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I am the daughter of a youth pastor. That same orphan boy who was raised by Catholic Charities, who I'm sure put the fun in dysfunctional in Northern Philadelphia without a mom and dad, ended up having three girls and running his own youth ministry in New Jersey. And it was crazy. It was hard. And I would ask him, "How do you keep going? How do you keep doing this? There's no thanks. There's no money." And he said, "I'm not called to stop." We're not called to stop. If you leave here today remembering one thing, just remember you're not called to stop.

The issue should not be how you feel about topics of life and marriage, but whether you expect there to be protection and respect for you and for others in your conscientious objections. At the end of the day the issue is this: Does the government have the power to silence you and punish you because you have a conscientious objection?

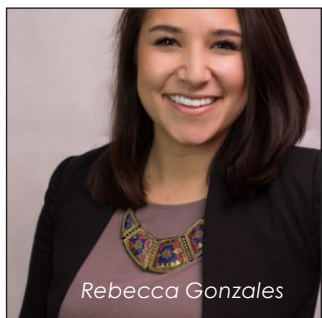
Isn't the true test of religious liberty—or any type of liberty—what happens when you *disagree*? Religious liberty is the foundation of all other liberties: The liberties that allow us to share what's most important to us. You can't have freedom of speech without first the freedom of conscience, freedom of association, and freedom of religion. All of these are built on a foundation of freedom of conscience. When a government claims the power to force people to deny their religious convictions, they start down the dangerous path of totalitarianism that not only inhibits religious freedom and the ability of us as humans to live according to our beliefs, but erodes all of our fundamental freedoms.

As we discuss Evangelical women, we must remember that the Bible's teaching is very clear on conscience. 1 Timothy 1:19 says, "We are in a battle, we must hold onto faith and a good conscience." Acts 24:16 says, "maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men." We have to answer to God for how we live out our conscience.

**Rebecca Gonzales** serves as the *Constituent Relations Director of the Philos Project*, a leadership community dedicated to

*promoting positive Christian engagement in the Middle East and providing educational programs, immersive travel, networking and advocacy opportunities.*

I want to zoom in on a situation in the Middle East that I believe as Evangelical women we should be more aware of: the persecution of Christian women across the Middle East.



There are trafficking rings across Egypt that specifically target Coptic young girls who are tricked, kidnapped, forced to marry older religious men, and forced to convert.

This ploy is simply to bring the Coptic community's youngest and most vulnerable into Islam, and then they are threatened by death if they want to leave. It is under Saudi law that a man, a husband, is able to beat, divorce, and even murder his wife if he finds that she has converted to Christianity. Thousands of Christian and Yazidi women have been sold into slave markets. Because of both their faith and gender, women across Iraq and Syria have faced slavery, rape, execution, and the most unthinkable acts of violence and humiliation in the years since ISIS has terrorized the region. This situation at hand is desperate, and our silence is deafening.

Just outside of Lebo, two Christian women were publicly raped and beheaded for refusing to denounce the name of Jesus Christ. A Christian man was forced to watch his wife and daughter be raped and executed right before his eyes; he later committed suicide. A document that was verified by the United Nations shows a price list of Christian and Yazidi girls. Perhaps the most horrifying aspect is that the prices were categorized by age group, and the most expensive were baby girls from ages 1 to 9-years-old at \$172 U.S. dollars. This is not new.

For centuries now, Christian, Jewish, and other minority women across the

region have faced persecution, execution, and exile in the very birthplace of their faith. And this does not end at what looks like the decline of ISIS. These scars are eternal. Christian women and all women across the West have been overwhelmingly apathetic and silent on the issue. As American women and daughters of the highest King, we have more power than we could ever imagine, and it's really time for us to step into our role as harnessing that power and standing up and praying for our sisters.

As Evangelical women, we should be the loudest voice in these conversations because they impact women in the region and at home the most.

**Bethany Goodman** is the *Assistant Director of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund*, overseeing the March's digital strategy, social media, and Evangelical outreach.

Abortion is a personal and sensitive topic to discuss. I want to say this upfront as a reminder that there is no pain, there



is no sin, there is no shame that is too great for the cross. There is no condemnation in Christ. A wealth of post-abortion resources are available, and many women and families have found hope and healing after abortion. If you're facing an unexpected

pregnancy, there's help. There are options available. You matter. Your baby matters, and you are strong and brave [enough] to be able to make the right choice.

Our entire society is affected by this massive loss of life that we've had over the years. Ultimately, I want to see 100 percent of Evangelical Christians understanding that life is sacred. We're not there yet, but we're getting closer. Ultimately, the end goal is to see abortion ended in our country, in our communities, in our churches, and in our families. CareNet research has shown that women

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# Lesbian Contested Bishop Warns against Creating an ‘Idol’ out of Jesus

by John Lomperis

**D**o those who have supported and defended the efforts to make Dr. **Karen Oliveto** a bishop in the United Methodist Church love the cause of LGBTQ liberation more than they love Jesus Christ?

If that question sounds too harsh, consider the jubilant words and actions of liberal caucus activists. They assert that Oliveto’s being an openly partnered lesbian activist—to the exclusion of other considerations, even [the public track record of her unorthodox theology](#)—made her the most qualified individual to be entrusted with a bishops’ responsibility to teach and guard the Christian faith. I have yet to observe any limits to the extremes of [theological oddity](#) or [mistreatment of other people](#) for which Oliveto’s supporters will give her a free pass. Consider [Oliveto’s August 19 weekly message](#).

In a key passage, Oliveto says:

Too many folks want to box Jesus in, carve him in stone, create an idol out of him. But this story cracks the pedestal we’ve put him on. The wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting one, prince of

peace, was as human as you and me. Like you and me, he didn’t have his life figured out. He was still growing, maturing, putting the pieces together about who he was and what he was supposed to do. We might think of him as the Rock of Ages, but he was more like a hunk of clay, forming and reforming himself in relation to God.

As one person put it: “Jesus wasn’t a know-it-all, he was also learning God’s will like any human being and finally he changed his

mind...if Jesus didn’t have to know it all innately, but rather could grow into new and deeper understanding through an openness to God’s people [even those he formerly discounted], maybe if Jesus could change his mind then maybe so can we!”

Create an idol out of Jesus? Yes, Jesus was and is fully human. That’s an indispensable part of the foundational Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

But aside from a brief mention in a list of traditional titles for Jesus, Oliveto’s message largely steers clear of the other

as by talking about Jesus “in relation to God” as in the excerpt cited above. Such sloppiness is not excusable in someone the church has set aside for the theologically trained role of ordained ministry, let alone a bishop.

In the case of the experienced, well-educated Dr. Oliveto, it seems less likely that this significant shift in language was simply unintentional.

Oliveto’s Yellowstone Conference staff have since removed the original post, but there has been no public apology, retraction, or explanation for why it is now being hidden.

By saying that Jesus Christ “was as human as you and me,” Oliveto makes clear that she means far more than that he began his physical life on Earth as an embryo in his mother’s womb or that he had a gender and ethnicity or that he was just as susceptible as we are to such limitations as hunger or fatigue. She jettisons traditional portrayals of Jesus as understanding his own mission while diligently pursuing it to paint Jesus as being as confused, uncertain, ignorant, and even fallible as the rest of us. As part of the basis for this new view of Jesus, Oliveto prefers the authority

of an individual mysteriously referred to as “one person” over the authority of the New Testament writers and church tradition.

The famous 18<sup>th</sup> century hymn addressed Jesus as “Rock of Ages,” invoking the biblical metaphor of God being a secure foundation for our lives. But Oliveto’s Jesus offers no such security. Instead, she urges seeing him as akin to an imperfect, unstable, unsolid “hunk of clay,” needing to be continually reformed



*The Syrophenician woman asks Christ to cure her, ca. 1650.  
(Photo: Pietro del Po / Wikimedia Commons)*

part of the Incarnation: that Jesus was and is fully and eternally divine. Indeed, it is difficult to see how her view of Jesus is ultimately higher than what might be affirmed by some Unitarians or even atheists.

Through most of this message, rather than using traditional Trinitarian language about Jesus Christ’s relationship with the Father (i.e., the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity), Oliveto uses essentially Unitarian language in framing Jesus as wholly separate and distinct from God, such

*Continued on page 11*

and changed for halting attempts at improvement.

Oliveto makes clear that her Jesus was not only deficient in his knowledge of facts, but was also *morally* faulty. Oliveto's Jesus is not a sinless Jesus! According to Oliveto, He needed to "learn" some moral truths that he had evidently never learned before the Syrophenician woman taught them to him, so that "he changed his mind" to accept that she was right and he was wrong. Oliveto insists that Jesus had to "come around" and experience "conversion," which she says that he did thanks to a human teacher he met in the course of his earthly ministry.

Meanwhile, Oliveto warns us not to "create an idol out of" Jesus Christ. The commonly accepted theological definition of an idol is something other than God, usually something created by human hands, improperly worshipped as a god. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary **broadly defines an "idol" as "a false god."**

It is impossible to idolize Jesus if he is truly God. So by definition, Oliveto's words mean that Jesus Christ is not God, and that to worship him as such would be to worship a false god!

The biblical passage that provoked Oliveto to reveal this part of her theology is an admittedly challenging one. Frankly, if I were leading an evangelistic one-on-one Bible study with a non-Christian friend, I would not choose to begin with [this Matthew 15:21-28 passage](#) (paralleled in [Mark 7:24-30](#)).

Oliveto is hardly alone in feeling unsettled by Jesus' initial refusal to heal a Syrophenician woman's demon-possessed daughter, first offering a brief proverb metaphorically identifying Jews as children and Gentiles like this woman as dogs.

Oliveto quickly concludes, from a superficial reading of the passage, that up until that point, Jesus sinfully "had made his life too small" and that Jesus needed to "give up his bigotries and prejudices" and learn that "the heart of God and the care of God" extends also to Gentiles, a truth

of which he was evidently unaware before that moment.

In rushing to make this negative judgment of Christ, Oliveto appears uninterested in how Christian commentary over the centuries has interpreted this passage

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in ways that illuminate Jesus' comment. Oliveto appears to have not consulted John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, part of [the UMC's official Doctrinal Standards](#). If she had, she may have benefitted from considering Wesley's remark on Christ's initial refusal to grant the woman's request: "**He sometimes tries our faith in like manner.**"

Contemporary discomfort on reading this passage stems from how utterly unfamiliar we are today with Christ's particular context of ancient Near Eastern Judaism and their divisions from other people groups in the area. But if we cannot be bothered to understand the Jewishness of Jesus then we cannot really understand Jesus.

One need not agree with everything **Karl Barth** said to appreciate the wisdom of that influential theologian's famous remark: "In spite of all the allegorizing and generalizing interpretation which it has not escaped to soften the offence, the Old Testament still remains from generation to generation to ensure that the particularist aspect of the Christian message directed to the world, the simple truth that Jesus Christ was born a Jew, is never

lost sight of, but constantly survives the irruption of all too generalized views of the man Jesus."

Also revealing is how this passage prompts Oliveto to ask, "Where is the gentle Jesus, meek and mild....?"

As with many clergy within the echo chamber of liberal United Methodist caucuses, she appears to be counting on widespread biblical illiteracy among her audience.

But the all-too-common portrayal of a consistently weak, inoffensive, undemanding "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" bears little relation to the actual Jesus we meet in the four Gospels. Just ask the temple money changers, Pharisees, or others with whom Jesus was hardly "gentle," including his own disciples. Just imagine the courage and stamina he exhibited when facing the devil himself while at the end of his physical limits. And no biblical

figure talked more about Hell than Jesus.

In the first book of his beloved *Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis includes a dialogue with a little girl who is afraid to meet the lion Aslan—who allegorically represents Jesus. She asks if Aslan is "safe." In response, she is told "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." Elsewhere, it is made clear that Aslan is "wild" and "not like a tame lion."

In contrast to the Jesus of historic, traditional Christian faith, including [the UMC's Doctrinal Standards](#), Karen Oliveto preaches a gospel of a Jesus who is tame, weak, inoffensive, and above all, *manageable*.

This Jesus described by Oliveto offers little to inspire, let alone command, awe, reverence, worship, and submission.

For Oliveto, maybe that's her point. ✚



**John Lomperis** directs the UMAAction program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

# Amidst Half-a-Billion Unreached, Singapore Anglicans Embrace Mission Opportunity

by Jeffrey Walton



Bishop Kuan Kim Seng (left) and Bishop Rennis Ponniah (right) pray at the Southeast Asia Mission Consultation Roundtable October 18-21 in Singapore. (Photo: St. Andrew's Anglican Cathedral, Singapore)

The average Anglican is a woman in her 30s living in sub-Saharan Africa on less than \$4 a day, Archbishop of Canterbury **Justin Welby** is regularly [quoted](#) as saying.

Contrary to the western stereotype of Anglicans as the country club set at prayer, the global family of churches has been shifting south for decades, and emerging Anglican churches in countries like Nepal and Cambodia may be a key part of its future.

Churches that trace their roots to the missionary activities of the Church of England have long existed in countries of the British Commonwealth. But the third largest branch of Christianity now does ministry in about 165 countries.

## A Mission-Minded Diocese

About 10-12,000 weekly attendees are now being ministered to at 83 churches in the Diocese of Singapore's Deanery of Nepal, which [welcomed](#) a handful of previously independent churches in the

late 1990s. Today, it is one of the fastest-growing areas in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The Diocese of Singapore has a long history: its 150-year-old Gothic Revival St. Andrew's Cathedral sits in the city-state's downtown core, a perch accessible to workers emerging from a subway station directly adjacent to the cathedral café. Posters for Alpha—the evangelical program first popularized in the Church of England—face out from windows where patrons sip lattes and flat whites while perusing books from Christian authors.

Christianity in Singapore itself has grown by more than 50 percent in the past 25 years, increasing from 12.7 percent of the population in 1990 to 20.1 percent in the 2015 census. Anglicans are part of that growth, influenced by a charismatic renewal that reinvigorated the aged colonial church. The Centre for Church Growth Research (CCGR) at Durham University reports that the Diocese of Singapore's attendance rose by more than 500

percent since 1980. Today, St. Andrew's offers at least 15 weekend services in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Filipino, Hokkien, and Bahasa Indonesia, among others.

The diocese is mission-minded, recognizing that its geographic proximity and location in a global financial center is well-suited to conduct ministry among neighboring countries with fledgling Christian populations. Personal on-the-ground stories lend credibility to the statistics: a cathedral member who became a Christian in the early 2000s now helps manage Project Khmer Hope, a [center](#) in Cambodia that breaks the cycle of poverty by training disadvantaged street children for jobs in the hospitality and tourism industry. A woman who grew up in a slum adjacent to the [Anglican Church of Christ Our Peace](#) in Phnom Penh came for the free biscuits as a young girl and now helps lead ministries in a Khmer-language congregation that has nearly tripled in size in the past year.

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“Our aim is to put in place well-functioning dioceses that will continue to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom in the six deanery countries, and even beyond,” reported the Rt. Rev. **Kuan Kim Seng**, Assistant Bishop for Missions in the Diocese of Singapore.

Those countries include Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, and Nepal (three dioceses already exist in Malaysia).

The Church of the Province of South East Asia, of which Singapore is a part, is a younger province in the Anglican Communion. Launched in 1996, the province has now grown to 98,000 adherents, about 20,000 of whom are located in Singapore. Most Reverend **Datuk Ng Moon Hing**, Archbishop of the province, shared that it is geographically the most expansive: a flight from Nepal on the western edge of the province is 12 hours from the far side of Indonesia on the Eastern edge. In between, more than 500 million people live, most of whom have never met a Christian, let alone heard the Gospel.

## Discipleship Focus

Archbishop Ng spoke in October at a missions roundtable convened every three years for churches and ministry organizations partnering in mission work in the region. Clergy and bishops from Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, and Myanmar were also present, and the largest group of participants is connected to the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA).

“If it takes millions of pounds a year to maintain a cathedral, should I not invest in the people?” Ng asked during his address to the roundtable. “The cathedral will not last forever—the people inside will.”

Noting that “focus on self will leave us disappointed,” Ng encouraged the gathered Anglicans to focus on discipleship of Jesus Christ, “not discipleship of club membership or fellowship.”

Referencing [2 Peter 3:8-10](#) that the Lord is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance,”

Ng encouraged the roundtable to focus upon discipleship and quality amidst excitement about numerical growth.

Ng’s words were echoed by the Rev. **Chris Royer** of Anglican Frontier Missions, who addressed the roundtable in an evening session.

“God has raised up the Anglican Church in Singapore to be a light to the nations,” Royer insisted, encouraging the roundtable to take risks in sharing the gospel.

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“The cathedral will not last forever—the people inside will.”

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“Since when do we decide who is open to the Gospel or not?” Royer asked. “We are here tonight because at some point, someone in our life shared the Gospel.”

## Fast-Growing and Vulnerable

About 3 percent of Nepal’s population is Christian, according to The Rev. Canon **Lewis Lew**, Dean of the Anglican Church in Nepal.

The 2015 earthquakes damaged structures across the country, including 30 Anglican Church buildings. According to Lew, 85 percent of those have now been rebuilt, and the remainder should be complete by the end of 2017. While the earthquakes left significant destruction in their wake, they also provided an opportunity for Christians to serve their neighbors. Of the practicing Anglican

Christians in Nepal, many have come to faith since the earthquakes, some citing relief efforts offered to believers and non-believers alike.

Christians in each of the deanery countries face significant challenges, but Nepal’s recently enacted [law](#) to curb evangelism by criminalizing religious conversion is of pressing concern to Christians there. Churches in Nepal experienced significant growth in the past few decades, growing from only a few hundred Christians prior to 1960 to at least 375,000 today (some Nepalese assert that the census undercounts Christians, and that the figure is actually closer to 1 million). According to a report by Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Nepal’s church is presently the fastest growing in the world.

Many of these new Christians are Dalits (“untouchables”). While the caste system has been legally abolished in Nepal, it still shapes Nepalese society, according to Lew. Western Nepal is almost completely unreached with the Gospel and isolated due to poor transportation and infrastructure, prompting calls for prayer and ministry for the region.

Christianity in Asia was estimated at 366 million adherents in 2009 and is projected to reach 490 million in 2025 at an annual growth percentage of 2.48 percent, according to [Christian World Communions: Five Overviews of Global Christianity](#).

If the growth of Anglican Christianity in the region during the past 20 years presages future activity, a future Archbishop of Canterbury may note that the average Anglican is from a place that only a generation before had not heard the Gospel. ✝



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



# What If Masterpiece Cakeshop Loses?

by Rick Plasterer

Jack Phillips of Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado (Photo: Alliance Defending Freedom)

Oral arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court took place earlier this month concerning the crucial religious liberty case of *Masterpiece Cakeshop vs. the Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, and it is not too soon to consider what the Christian response should be if Christian baker **Jack Phillips** loses his case against making a custom cake for a homosexual wedding.

Such cases are due to the mangling of law and logic by the Supreme Court. The court has used the Constitution's guarantees of "liberty" and "equality" to reason that laws that penalize homosexuality (as in the *Lawrence vs. Texas* decision in 2003) or which deny special protected status to homosexuals (as in the *Romer vs. Evans* case in 1996) are violations of "liberty" and "equal protection."

But this depends on reasoning that homosexual behavior and inclination are characteristics that define a particular class of people who constitutionally must be "equal" to all others. All behaviors and inclinations clearly are not equal, and to legally require that all behaviors be equal would make all crimes legal, since any crime might be committed on the basis of personal identity, and accorded "equal" or "protected" status.

The Supreme Court does not have a special power to discern moral truth. That people are entitled to the sexual behavior they want is a moral intuition offered as the basis of the contraception decisions (*Griswold vs. Connecticut* and *Eisenstadt vs. Baird*) and expanded to cover what we now call LGBT issues. It is not reasonably implied by constitutional guarantees of "liberty" or "equality."

Nevertheless, this reasoning has been used to go beyond the legalization of

homosexuality to deplore discrimination against it by private citizens. If Masterpiece Cakeshop wins, Justice **Anthony Kennedy** will have to reverse his previous reasoning, which has been followed by almost all lower courts. Only free speech seems to offer hope of vindication for Masterpiece Cakeshop.

If Masterpiece Cakeshop loses, fallout will include not only the wedding industry, but the counseling professions, where assisting with homosexual relationships or behavior may be wanted; health professions, where surgery or treatment to change sexual anatomy is wanted; legal occupations, where assistance with same-sex marriage or divorce is wanted; teaching professions with respect to what may or must be said in the classroom, regardless of factual truth or the instructor's conviction; and even **religious counseling**, which may be restricted as "harmful."

Even occupations and organizations not directly connected with anything sexual may be closed to faithful Christians if people are expected to declare themselves "allies" of the LGBT cause (as in Obama's **Justice Department**), or are penalized for what they say (or have said in the past) in support of traditional morality.

Despite **assurances** that no one but people desiring freedom from traditional morality would be affected by homosexual (and now transgender) liberation, it defines as "violence" any disagreement with its claims to the righteousness of homosexuality or transgenderism. And the key to that is the identification of persons with their inclinations and behaviors, rather than as beings with a fixed nature. Opponents of the sexual revolution were not Chicken Littles, as boys in girls restrooms now **attest**. "No one will be inconvenienced" subtly, and quickly, became "no one should be inconvenienced."

The loss of talent and service to society will be great if many Christians decline to

be part of occupations that require accommodation to homosexuality or transgenderism. This ought to be an argument against the draconian sexual orientation/gender identity laws, but the argument in the ongoing morality struggle will of course be that religious dogma is to blame. Claims that religious doctrine is justified by reason, evidence, and common sense will not avail; the fact that religious doctrine is unalterable and the real reason for believers' conscientious objection will be held to make any other argument irrelevant.

But the sexual revolutionaries' commitment to sexual self-determination is just as dogmatic. No principled appeal to "equality" or "liberty" can be consistently made in support of this dogma, since all behaviors cannot be consistently protected. Religious and moral integrity, however pained anyone is, must be the continual response of Christians, plus the classic freedoms of religion, speech, and association that were core American values until attacked by the sexual revolution.

Christians should not acquiesce to sinful laws and requirements. To do so is wrong in itself, and contrary to Jesus' commandment not to contribute to sin (**Matthew 18:7**). It is not justified by any good that might result, and also will have a tendency to change belief. Forced into underclass status, with even the right of churches and families to maintain their integrity before God threatened, life may be difficult for years, and for more than this generation. But the cost of discipleship is unconditional obedience to God. ✚



**Rick J. Plasterer** is a staff writer for the Institute on Religion and Democracy

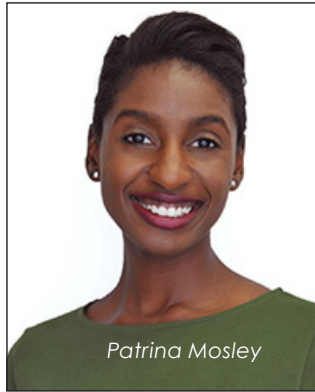
# Addressing Evangelical Women's Public Witness

Continued from page 9

who attend church are still having abortions. We can say that 75 percent of us believe that abortion is morally wrong and that life is sacred...but women are still part of our churches and choosing abortion. We don't know the situation in all of those cases certainly, but we need to be embracing those life values in our personal walks. Our churches should be safe havens for any woman, any family, that is experiencing an unexpected pregnancy or a challenging prenatal diagnosis. Our churches should be embracing those women, embracing those families, and encouraging them to make the right choice and supporting them all along the way. What I want to leave with you is a personal challenge: Each one of us may not be able to influence the entirety of the Evangelical culture, but if you can make a difference in your church or your family, that's a big deal.

**Patrina Mosley** is Family Research Council Action's Assistant Director. She oversees daily operations, communications, and content marketing for voter education, activist tools, and grassroots mobilization projects.

We as human beings have all struggled with our identity in some form or fashion, saying, "Who am I? What are my gifts? What are my talents? What's my place in this world?" So the idea of identity shouldn't be totally abstract to us, and we shouldn't subtract ourselves from the issues just because we may not be searching for our identity sexually. Maybe you've heard your friends say, "You know, these issues are just crazy. This is just nuts. Why are we arguing over bathrooms? Why are we bending over backwards and giving civil rights to people who may feel one way this day and one way the next day?" What I want to present to you from an Evangelical perspective is that at the end of the day, we don't want to win people to a certain political party or to a certain persuasion. What we want to do is win people to Christ. That is the end goal of all that we do. Public policy is an extension



Patrina Mosley

of what we believe.

We have loved ones who are struggling with sexual identity and human sexuality. You hear a lot of libertarian-leaning arguments that say, "We should just live and let live. This isn't a big deal. We shouldn't care."

For us, as Evangelicals, the main reason we should care is the picture of marriage and what that represents, the picture of human sexuality and what that

represents. We see a picture of that in Ephesians chapter 5:22-32.

The picture of the gospel is presented in a male/female union. We can oppose unrighteous policies, but at the same time we can love people. They're not opposites, but they work together to bring glory to God. In this picture, marriage is not an accident. You see that it is the picture of love, commitment, pursuit, being chosen, and that unity factor. As Christ sacrificed himself for the church so a husband sacrifices himself for his wife and loves and cares for her. So this picture is not by accident, and it was from the beginning starting with Genesis 1:27. ✚

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## IRD Diary: Who Turned the Lights Off?

Continued from page 16

"perfect-er" and "truer" instead of clearer and more accessible.

Truth is always relevant and in short supply. The only place to find truth in abundance is in the Holy Scriptures. Humanity and its problems are constantly shifting but sin is ever present and the need for a Redeemer is ever unwavering.

It's not hard to make me cry in a church service. What I fear most for the future of the Church is that emotional response has become synonymous with being moved spiritually. **Ravi Zacharias**, the renowned apologist put it this way:

We have bought into the philosophy that we need to cater only to the emotional faculty of our believers and so we manufacture feelings in our churches... Feelings are a powerful thing but they should follow belief not create belief. In our churches, this whole move towards an emotional, celebratory stance [is] born in [a] doctrinal vacuum where the person knows less and less of why [and] what they believe but more and more about how ecstatic they are because of it.

Quaker meeting halls are notoriously devoid of clutter, with little decoration

beside rows of pews between white walls. But if you asked a Quaker to describe his sanctuary, he would describe huge windows that line otherwise barren walls, overwhelming the room in natural light. The space is meant to symbolize the very presence of God saturating his gathered people in his truth.

Church in America, please don't turn your lights off. Keep the sanctuaries and truth illumined for the world to see. ✚

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From the President:

## Removing George Washington

Continued from page 3

away from him by an insolvent master. Allen's [eulogy](#) of Washington is itself a response to Christ Church: He appreciatively recalled Washington the liberator and emancipator whose name "will live when the sculptured marble and statue of bronze shall be crumbled into dust—for it is the decree of the eternal God that 'the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, but the memorial of the wicked shall rot.'" ✚

## IRD Diary:

# Who Turned the Lights Off in American Churches?

by Savannah Husmann

The first thing I noticed about the church service was the darkness of the sanctuary. But even more striking were repetitive songs rife with “Christianese” (vague metaphors that I had a hard time unravelling).

Something in the song was always on fire, be it our hearts, this nation, our generation, this place. Lyrics to the effect of “You are good/I am loved” were in every song. Repeated phrases and “yeahs” or “woahs” intermixed with guitar solos replaced the songs with actual doctrine and theology. I didn’t think much of it until I noticed the emotional reaction from the congregation.

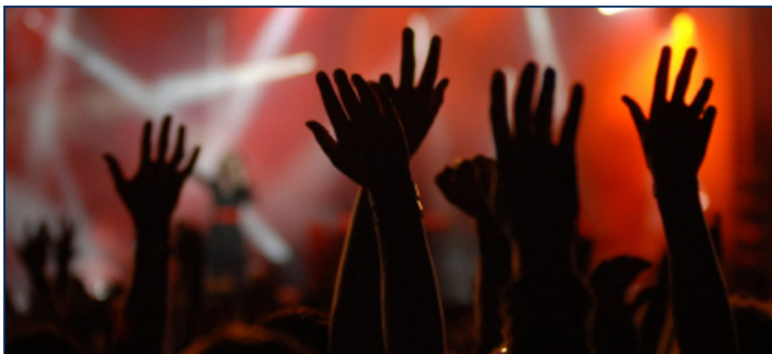
People were reacting to the music in ways I’d never seen: arms waved high, wristbands glinting in the multicolored lights, interpretative dances in the aisles, and a barefoot pastor laying supine before the stage. (“It’s called ‘soaking,’” I was later told.)

I was dismayed. Beautiful lyrics that had made knowledge about God accessible had been traded for cheap slogans. Conduct that once demonstrated reverence was replaced with behavior that could fit in at Coachella. Long gone are [the days of Bach](#), but I wonder: How are Christians supposed to combat the scourge of secularism by conforming more to it?

I’m often criticized by fellow believers for maintaining such strong resentment for the watered-down songs that replaced the hymns of my upbringing. Honestly, it is a well-founded critique. Words like “prostrate” and “Ebenezer” alienate people who are seeking the Gospel but were not raised with Church vocabulary. It’s

fair to point out that, at the time of their conception, now-traditional hymns were berated for sounding like well-known bar songs of the day.

To participate in worship is to force the body into agreement with what the heart and mind already know. Worship music sums up truths in fewer words and more emotion than a lecture. We are cre-



(Photo: Dailymotion)

ated to be emotional, intelligent, empathetic people who can testify to the existence of our Creator’s love not just because it makes *rational sense* but because we have experienced it first-hand.

With these valid criticisms, why maintain a strong opinion on the musical stylings of Hillsong and **Chris Tomlin**?

The problem is that most of these shifts in worship styles have been done in response to mass emigration from stratified religious structures.

Some religious authorities blame it on secularization, millennials, technology, or on snobbish church-goers. These diagnoses may be true, but how is the church trying to solve these problems?

The fear is that in pursuing 21st century relevance, the Church is straying ever farther from its original purpose.

The purpose of the Church body, in the wake of Christ’s ascension, was to establish a support system for

believers to gather, worship, take care of one another, and minister. They were called to be set apart from their idolatrous surroundings and be a holy testament to the character of the God they served.

Today, what has happened to corporate confession of sin? To communion? Why do mission trips double as exotic vacations while outreach to local communities has atrophied to the extent that churches are the most segregated institutions in the nation?

A friend told me about an experience that highlights this problem. His Seattle church was sending a group of adolescents to Hawaii on a mission trip focused upon homelessness.

Do the homeless populations of Oahu need Jesus? Of course. But does this group need to take an expensive, sponsored trip to a tropical island where more than 40 vibrant church communities already work in this area of ministry? Probably not. This church is located in the city with the [third largest homeless population](#) in the country.

The issue the 21st century Church faces is not one of relevance but of straying from original purpose. We have tried to make perfect truth

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**Savannah Husmann** is a junior at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, and was an IRD Summer 2017 intern.



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