

faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Christmas 2020

Episcopal Church Marriages Plunge

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The Rev. Dr. Bob Fu prays for China at The Return prayer rally on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., on September 26, 2020. See page 8. (Photo: Faith McDonnell / IRD)

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THE INSTITUTE ON
RELIGION & DEMOCRACY
1023 15th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202.682.4131
Web: www.TheIRD.org
E-mail: info@TheIRD.org

PRESIDENT
Mark D. Tooley

EDITORIAL
Jeffrey Walton
Executive Editor,
Communications Manager

STAFF
Faith J. H. McDonnell
Director of Religious Liberty Programs

John Lomperis
UMAction Director

Rick J. Plasterer
Staff Writer

Chelsen Vicari
Evangelical Action Director

Marc LiVecche
Scholar on Christian Ethics,
War and Peace

Dan Moran
Research Assistant

Kennedy Lee
IRD Intern

Cover: A marriage ceremony at Grace Episcopal Church in Asheville, NC (Photo: Ryan Bumgarner Photography)

Missionary Rescued and Captors Killed

American missionary **Philip Walton** was rescued in Nigeria this autumn by the U.S. Navy's SEAL Team 6, who killed six of Walton's seven captors. None of the rescuing commandos were harmed. Walton, age 27, was kidnapped from his farm in neighboring Niger in late October. His family, which included wife, young daughter, and brother, was left behind bound and gagged.

Walton had been working as a missionary in that region for a year. The kidnappers' motivation apparently was financial and not political. They demanded ransom from Walton's father, a missionary in Niger for many years.

Was this dramatic rescue by U.S. armed forces morally justified from a Christian theological perspective? Possibly many Christian thinkers would say no, at least if they are consistent in their stance against "violence" and "empire."

Walton apparently was rescued quickly, thanks to CIA intelligence and collaboration from Nigeria and Niger, partly out of fear that his kidnappers could sell him to Islamist militants common in Niger and northern Nigeria. Christian aid worker **Jeffery Rey Woodke** has been captive four years since his kidnapping also in Niger. Italian Catholic priest Fr. **Pier Luigi Maccalli** was released recently after two years in captivity by Islamic jihadists who kidnapped him in Niger and held him in neighboring Mali, whose government negotiated his liberation in a prisoner exchange. Some governments have paid ransoms for their kidnapped nationals, which the U.S. has criticized.

Of course, Walton was rescued not because he was a Christian missionary but because he is an American entitled to protection from his government. Not all Americans kidnapped overseas receive expeditious liberation by SEAL Team 6. But evidently there was an unusual and fortunate confluence of circumstances, opportunity, information and resources making this rescue possible. Another motivation was the deterrence effect on future kidnappers tempted to procure Americans as hostages for reasons pecuniary or political.

Ideally, Nigeria's police or armed forces would've rescued Walton. But the Nigerian government sadly is unable to protect even its own citizens from routine raids by Islamist insurgents and other renegades in its northern mostly Muslim regions. The U.S. acted because local authorities evidently could not, although Nigeria reportedly was supportive.

Christians should celebrate Walton's liberation not just because he was a missionary but because his rescue was an act of justice in which his government rightly lived up to the calling for which all governments are ordained: protecting their people from harm.

Many American Christian elites have a different perspective, dismissing the state's vocation for lethal force in military or police affairs. They would insist that Christians as followers of the Prince of Peace must reject all force, especially if lethal. They are particularly derisive towards "empire," which they equate

primarily with America. They furiously resist any Christian collaboration with empire as grievously contradictory to the Gospel.

This attitude begs the question as to their preferred scenario for kidnapped missionary Philip Walton. Would he preferably have remained captive for many years, possibly sold to terrorists, perhaps never to return to his wife and young daughter? Or should ransom have been paid, encouraging future kidnappings? Or perhaps imprisoned kidnappers or terrorists should have been exchanged for him, thus encouraging future terror?



The raid to rescue Walton (right) included a quartet of both CV-22B Osprey tilt-rotors and MC-130 special operations transports. (Photo: National Interest)

Kidnapped Christian missionaries from other nations have not been similarly liberated because their governments lack the military capacity to do so. In this sense, Americans have a unique advantage as citizens of "empire" with broad military and political reach. Most American Christians are thankful but some lament.

Christian pacifists would especially lament that six of seven kidnappers were killed by SEAL Team 6 during their liberation of Walton. Their lives had God-ordained value too, these pacifists would stress. Indeed they did. But by waging terror, these kidnappers, who likely have committed similar crimes, and almost

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Mark Tooley



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

Episcopal Panel: Bishop Guilty in Opposing Same-Sex Rites

A traditionalist bishop who opposes same-sex marriage rites in the church has been found guilty by a Hearing Panel of failing to abide by the *Discipline and Worship of The Episcopal Church* in violation of his ordination vows.

The decision came nearly two years after Episcopal Diocese of Albany Bishop **William H. Love** directed clergy not to use trial rites solemnizing marriages between persons of the same sex.

Following the Hearing Panel decision, Love subsequently announced to his diocesan synod in October that he has entered into a voluntary accord with Presiding Bishop **Michael Curry** and will resign as diocesan bishop in February 2021. The agreement concludes any

reasons for his decision against implementing the rites. The bishop characterizes the dispute as part of his dioceses' "faithfulness in upholding God's Word."

Access to "provisional" same-sex rites was originally at the discretion of diocesan bishops, but the dispute began after the church's General Convention meeting July 5-13, 2018, in Austin, Texas, passed Resolution B012 mandating access to same-sex trial rites over the objections of a diocesan bishop.

Curry placed a restriction January 11, 2019, on Love's ministry and began the disciplinary process.

Love argued that the Episcopal Church *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) still upholds marriage as between a man and a woman and that Resolution B012 was not a properly constituted revision.

Following the ruling, Bishops **Lawrence Provenzano** of Long Island and **Dorsey McConnell** of Pittsburgh, the resolution's sponsors, authored an open letter that the Panel erred in saying that Resolution B012 "was properly constituted and passed as an authorized revision to the BCP."

"B012 did not revise the Prayer Book," Provenzano and McConnell wrote. "B012 merely set the terms for the *trial use* of the liturgies in question."

Episcopalians have steadily embraced same-sex unions, first consecrating an openly partnered gay bishop in 2003, followed by a bishop in a Lesbian relationship in 2009. Bishops in same-sex partnerships have since been elected and consecrated to lead dioceses in Maine, Michigan, and Missouri. ✚

Unitarian Sexologist's Abortion-Promoting Institute Shuttters Citing 'Devastating Loss'

A once-prominent interfaith organization co-founded by a sexologist and Unitarian Universalist minister advocating for unrestricted abortion as well as gay and transgender causes within churches is closing its doors.

"We came to the painful conclusion after several years of decreasing institutional support for our work," a letter from the Religious Institute Board of Directors reads.

The board includes among its members a Presbyterian seminary professor and Planned Parenthood chaplain who authored the book *Erotic Justice* as well as a "trans-femme and queer educator."

Co-founded in 2001 by The Rev. **Debra Haffner**, the Religious Institute styles itself an advocate for "sexual health, education and justice." The institute touted strong ties to homosexual advocacy organizations, as well as liberal religious groups that operate within the Mainline Protestant churches.

Haffner and the Religious Institute were critical of denominations that did not embrace them.

Responding to the decision of the United Methodist General Conference not to change language declaring homosexuality as "incompatible with Christian teaching," Haffner convened officials

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Bishop William H. Love of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany, New York speaks at the Church of Ireland Diocese of Down & Dromore Clergy Conference in October 2018. (Photo: Diocese of Down & Dromore)

further matters by the Hearing Panel, which had been scheduled to discuss disciplinary action.

Love cited his obligation as a bishop "called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church" among several



Religious Institute co-founder the Rev. Debra Haffner (in yellow clergy stole) participates in a 2017 rally in Washington, D.C., demanding that private employers be required to pay for employees' birth control coverage. (Photo: Debra Haffner / Twitter)

from two dozen liberal religious organizations to endorse a statement rebuking the church's stance.

But the group's interests encompassed more than church institutions. It spearheaded a defense of the contraception/

abortifacient mandate in the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare).

The institute's historic focus on abortion and LGBTQ causes may have run aground in a season in which racial issues and criminal justice reform have

predominated at the forefront of the Religious Left.

"This is a devastating loss for the movement at a time when sexual, gender and reproductive health, rights and justice are under great attack," the board letter reads. "Our opponents are weaponizing the language of religious liberty as a core tactic to ban abortion, strip LGBTQ people of their rights and humanity, and deny basic sexual and reproductive health services to all people."

"We—as an organization and as individuals—have always been rooted in faith," the Religious Institute Board of Directors insisted. "Faith in the dignity of every human being as a reflection of the divine image."

But the unborn didn't qualify, in the view of Haffner and others at the Religious Institute, which held that abortion is "a moral decision."

"The health and life of the woman must take precedence over the life of the fetus," a 2005 letter organized by the Religious Institute read. ✚

Liberal Megachurch Set to Leave United Methodist Church

After a two-year legal battle, the United Methodist Church (UMC) and Glide Memorial Church have come to a \$6 million settlement that will see the San Francisco institution leave the denomination but retain its building.

A joint statement by the California-Nevada Annual Conference and Glide says the settlement allows the two organizations to move forward and "to pursue different aspects of Lizzie Glide's Trust as wholly separate and autonomous organizations."

Lizzie Glide was a San Francisco philanthropist and Methodist laywoman, who in 1929 established a trust in memory of her late husband, J.H. Glide, in order to establish a center to care for the local community and to share the gospel according to the doctrine of the Methodist Church.

Glide is one of the largest Methodist churches by membership, claiming 13,000 members but fewer than 1,900 attendees,

amounting to almost 19 percent of the California-Nevada Annual Conference's total membership. It is one of the most prominent progressive United Methodist

churches, declaring formal affiliation with Reconciling Ministries Network, a pro-LGBTQ advocacy organization active across the UMC. ✚



The exterior of Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, California (Photo: SFist.com)

Turkey 'Committing Another Christian Genocide' Advocacy Group Warns

In the wake of an eruption of fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, a leading advocacy group for vulnerable Christian populations is urging the United States to take a strong stance against Turkey.

Non-profit organization In Defense of Christians (IDC) deems Turkish involvement to be part of a coordinated campaign against ancient Christian communities in the region.

Conflict flared in September when Azerbaijan launched a military operation in the region. Turkey swiftly intervened on the side of the Azeris.

"[Turkish President **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**] helps terrorism in the Middle East, and he's trying to spread his terrorist activities all over," stated IDC President

Toufic Baaklini in an October briefing on the conflict, alleging Turkish mobilization of ISIS fighters into Azerbaijan. Baaklini called on U.S. President **Donald Trump** to "heavily sanction Turkey and reassess the entire relationship."

Briefing panelists argued that the U.S. President and Secretary of State can play a crucial role in the cooling of the conflict. The briefing depicted the conflict as not just between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, but about the continued existence of remaining Christians in the Caucasus and Middle East.

"If Turkey was before behind the scenes, now they're completely hands on," said Permanent Representative to the United States **Robert Avetsiyan** of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, the ethnically Armenian-majority region surrounded by Azerbaijan.

"There has always been an excuse [in Washington policy circles] until this point for Turkey's behavior," said American Enterprise Institute scholar **Michael Rubin**. "It seems clear now that Turkey's sole motivation...has been purely animosity not just to Armenians as a people, but to Christianity as a religion."

Secretary of State **Mike Pompeo** spoke on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in an October 14 press conference and stated, "We've watched Turkey begin to reinforce Azerbaijan. We have asked every international player to stay out of the region, not to continue to reinforce trouble, and we are working to deliver that."

"Erdoğan perceives U.S. and NATO silence as weakness," IDC's **Rich Ghazal** said, adding that Erdoğan speaks only "one language, and that is strength." Ghazal asserted that Turkey's current campaign against Assyrian Christians in the Middle East "meets the internationally-recognized definition of genocide."

Despite his insistence that Erdoğan's regime poses a threat to Christians in the region, Baaklini has not lost hope. "This is where Christianity began, and this is where Christianity is going to stay, with our help and support." ✝

Emirates Court Convicts Nigerian Terrorism Supporters

A recent court decision in the United Arab Emirates has found that Nigerian jihadists established financial networks and utilized overseas connections to raise funds.

On November 9, a Federal Appeals Court in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, upheld the guilty verdict of six Nigerian nationals convicted of transferring \$782,000 to jihadist organization Boko Haram between 2015 and 2016. Boko Haram has killed many in Nigeria and its target is often Nigerian Christians.

Two suspects were sentenced to life imprisonment. The remaining four were sentenced to ten-year prison sentences.

The convicted individuals operated during the time in which Turkey allegedly shipped arms to Boko Haram beginning in 2014.

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Photo: zamanawsl.net)

Persecution of Christians in Burkina Faso

Christians in the north of Africa's Burkina Faso have been abandoning their churches to avoid Jihadi violence according to a recent account in *Premier Christian News*. The article reported, "According to one pastor in the north of the country, there are no open churches in the north eastern triangle of Burkina Faso."

Recently released figures from the UN Refugee Agency indicate that more than one million people have been displaced by the violence that has plagued the West African nation.

Illia Djadi, senior analyst on freedom of religion and belief in sub-Saharan Africa for the non-denominational mission Open Doors, told *Premier Christian News* that Catholic Christians are identified by their names or by wearing crosses and they are killed.

"Others have been slaughtered when militants stormed their church services," Djadi told the news service. He added that Christian leaders, both pastors and bishops, have also been targeted and murdered. And that an "unknown number of pastors and their families have been abducted and remain in captivity."



A bullet hole that remains after an attack killed 58 people in Burkina Faso (Photo: Barnabas Fund UK)

Similar to what happened to Christians in Iraq under the jihadist group Islamic State (ISIS), Christians in some parts of Burkina Faso were given an ultimatum to convert to Islam or to leave. This was part of an Islamist program to sow terror. "Jihadists assassinated Christians and forced remaining believers to flee after threatening that they would return," *Premier Christian News* reported.

One well-documented attack in February 2020 resulted in the death of 24 worshipers. *The New York Times* in an article on February 17 revealed that Jihadist groups with links to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State wanted control over rural areas of Burkina Faso.

That attack was followed in late May by a weekend of attacks resulting in the deaths of 58 people in three villages, according to an article in *Christian Post*. One of the assaults targeted a group of Christians and humanitarian aid workers. They were taking food to an internally displaced persons camp housing Christian refugees, the U.K. Christian aid agency Barnabas Fund told the newspaper. ✝

Recordings of arms shipments emerged in November 2019, prompting the Nigerian military to launch an investigation. Concerns over Turkish arms flowing into Nigeria had reached a crescendo in 2017 when four shipments of mislabeled weapons from Turkey were seized by customs officials in Lagos.

Boko Haram is listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States and a number of other nations. Because of its listing, Boko Haram attracts more scrutiny than other Islamist groups active in Nigeria. ✝

At right: Abu Dhabi Federal Court (Photo: Gulfnews.com)



Support for Chinese Pastor Under Attack

Bob Fu of China Aid Finds Midland, Texas, Has His Back

by Faith McDonnell

For over a month in late 2020, mobs of demonstrators directed by a Chinese billionaire subjected the Reverend **Bob and Heidi Fu** and their family to frightening attacks. Fu, founder and president of China Aid, is a former prisoner of

responding to his calls on his social media and personal website to go after “enemies.” Wengui slanders leading critics of the CCP regime—like Bob and other Chinese dissidents and freedom fighters now in the West—by calling them thieves and traffickers. Many of those he threatens were leaders of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, still on the Communists’ “Most Wanted” list.

Protesters declared Bob was a “fake pastor” and responsible for COVID-19. They brandished signs with ridiculous claims in front of the Fuses’ house and China Aid office. Some days ominous black buses pulled up in front of the family’s home, unloading dozens of protesters. This went on for weeks, forcing the family to seek refuge in “safe houses” (each family member separated from the others, adding to the anguish and stress).

Law enforcement, churches, and the wider community of the very close-knit city of Midland have all stood up for Bob and his family. When Bob flew home from Washington at the beginning of this horrific experience he reported, “Got home safely with full police and anti-riot squad security details. . . I am so thankful for this kind of thoughtfulness and care by our city.” IRD also supported Bob by sponsoring a petition to the White House signed by hundreds of organizations and individuals.

Midland’s mayor, **Patrick Payton**, held a supportive press conference on October 5. The mayor dispelled Wengui’s lie that the CCP gives Fu funds to fly back and forth to Beijing. Payton stated that Fu and his wife “fled China in 1997, and hadn’t been allowed to set foot” in the country since then. The indignant mayor mocked accusations of Fu being a powerful Communist agent. He highlighted those for whom Bob and China Aid are working,

such as Chinese Christians and other religious believers in prison for their faith, and the attorneys who are defending them. Wengui responded by adding Mayor Payton to his threats in his next video!

The latest is that a federal lawsuit was filed on November 13 on behalf of the Fuses against Guo Wengui, his media company GTV Media Group, and two associates. The suit, filed by a legal team led by the Honorable Ken Starr, charges that Wengui offered individuals up to \$10,000 to participate in attacks against Bob Fu. The Midland Reporter-Telegram says “the lawsuit states Wengui told his followers Fu and others are part of a ‘global kill cheaters’ campaign and instructed his followers to ‘get rid of’ Fu.” The paper also indicates that on October 21 “the Midland Police Department bomb squad” was “placed on emergency standby” when Wengui allegedly told his followers to “bomb Fu’s home.”

Hopefully this legal action will bring an end to the harassment of Bob Fu and all the other dissidents. In the words of one friend of Bob’s, “Let’s pray that justice will be done, and for Bob’s and his family’s continued safety.”

Many in the West have emboldened the CCP in recent years. Large, powerful entities like Disney, the NBA, Big Tech, major U.S. banks, and others consistently acquiesce. Some companies have lobbied *against* legislation aimed at banning from import products created with the slave labor of Uyghur, Falun Gong, and Christian prisoners. The CCP believes it can control Americans, so no wonder they think they can take down Chinese freedom fighters in America. Midland, Texas, is proving them wrong! ✝



The Rev. Dr. Bob Fu prays for China at The Return prayer rally on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. September 26, 2020 (Photo: Faith McDonnell / IRD)

faith in China (and recently became IRD International Religious Liberty Program Senior Fellow). He knows what it is to be targeted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime. But now, calling Midland, Texas, home, the Fu family knows what it’s like to have your whole town come to your defense, stand with you, and pray for you.

Bob was scheduled to lead prayer for persecuted Christians in China at a gathering called *The Return*, September 25, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Just before reaching the podium he received shocking news. Aggressive protesters were surrounding his Midland home, harassing Heidi, the children, and his elderly mother-in-law. He asked tens of thousands of *The Return* attendees to pray for his family. Then Bob prayed for God to transform China into a “mission-sending” nation and bring Communist leaders to repentance.

The thugs were sent by billionaire **Guo Wengui**, aka **Miles Kwok**,



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



United Theological Seminary has steadily grown in recent years. (Photo: Dayton Business Journal)

Orthodox Methodist Seminaries Grow while Others Falter

by John Lomperis

This is a very difficult moment for American seminaries of all kinds. Across the country, they face declining enrollment and finances, resulting in significant layoffs of faculty and staff. Much of this stems from major long-term factors that posed growing challenges even before the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic downturn. Over the next few years, we should not be too surprised to see some once-significant schools of theology either merge or permanently close.

But within the United Methodist seminary world, two have been notable exceptions to these trends in financial and numerical health. They have also stood out for their comparative faithfulness to historic, biblical, orthodox Christian faith.

This fall, United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, saw a major increase, of 17 percent, in new student enrollments compared to last year. Its total enrollment is now 446 students. In this era, it is no small thing for an American seminary to even maintain its numbers. United President **Kent Millard** has said that the pandemic may have actually helped the school's enrollment, as this current climate has prompted some to

recognize a call to ministries "where they can help others and bring a message of God's hope."

United's commitments to the historic faith as expressed in the Nicene Creed and its embrace of the charismatic movement have set it apart from the UMC's other 12 official U.S. seminaries. United recently began a new partnership with Mosaix Global Network, which is devoted to developing multi-ethnic congregations.

Then there is Asbury Theological Seminary. While not officially a United Methodist seminary, all of its presidents since 1994 have been United Methodist, it has many United Methodist faculty, and has recently, depending on the year, educated more new United Methodist clergy than any other or almost any other American seminary. With its formal commitments to biblical authority and historic Wesleyan doctrine, it has long been a bastion of evangelical Methodism. Its main campus is in Wilmore, Kentucky, but it has expanded to extension sites in Orlando, Florida; Memphis, Tennessee; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and now, as of this semester, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Even with all the new curve balls from the novel Coronavirus, this fall Asbury saw its seventh straight year of

increased new student enrollment. The fall 2020 semester is distinguished as having both the largest-ever number of new students (514) and, with record retention rates, the largest-ever total enrollment (1,806 students from 44 states and 50 countries). For fellow number-crunching geeks, a record number of credit-hours are now being taken at Asbury. Asbury President **Timothy Tennent** has celebrated the school's reaching record numbers in new student enrollments, total students, and classes taken as a historic "triple crown" achievement.

Before the pandemic, both institutions had extensively embraced virtual learning, which seems to have helped prepare them for this unusual season.

Both schools are good options for faithful United Methodist seminarians.

The growing strength of these schools bodes well for the future as we prepare for the coming transition in The United Methodist Church. ✝



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



Bishop Michael Curry preaches during the 2018 wedding ceremony of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. (Photo: Pool photo / Owen Humphreys)

Episcopal Church Marriages Plunge by Two-Thirds Since 2003

by Jeffrey Walton

Episcopalians, briefly in the limelight as Presiding Bishop **Michael Curry** preached at the 2018 wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, aren't marrying much of anybody these days. This according to an annual release of church statistics that reveal marriages in the denomination have declined by 66% since 2003 and baptisms are down by more than half.

In short, the old adage of clergy responsibility to preside over “hatch, match and dispatch” is no longer occurring.

Gradual decline of attendance and membership in the 1.6 million-member denomination is “no news” news, but annually draws reader interest.

After posting my report to IRD's blog, *Juicy Ecumenism*, it took the

denomination's Episcopal News Service another nine days to offer coverage. The candid and well-sourced ENS report was published at exactly 5:30 p.m. on a Friday. Readers can draw their own conclusion.

Attendance and membership are two objective metrics that garner attention, but like an automobile speedometer, they only indicate how the denomination is moving at present. Other metrics, especially marriages and baptisms, are valuable leading indicators.

Marriage Isn't What Brings Us Together Today

In 2003 the Episcopal Church conducted 19,017 marriages. That year is a demarcation point when divorced and openly same-sex partnered **Gene Robinson** was elected and consecrated as bishop for the

Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire, exacerbating denominational strife that had been unfolding for decades. Large-scale departures began with the 2006 election of **Katharine Jefferts Schori** as Presiding Bishop.

Last year (2019) marriages conducted in the Episcopal Church were 6,484 (down 66% from 2003—a two-thirds decline in marriages). An 11 percent decline was reported in 2019 alone.

Reasons for this decline are manifold—marriage rates are down among the U.S. population (although not nearly that much). Those who do marry increasingly opt for ceremonies at secular venues like vineyards, beaches, or botanical gardens—venues that don't require ordained Episcopal clergy.

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This being acknowledged, it is ironic how redefinition of marriage within the Episcopal Church corresponds with fewer marriages, just as proclamations of “inclusion” led to including fewer and fewer people in the life of the church.

I noted in 2015 that Episcopal Church officials enacted policies that the majority of Anglicans worldwide refute as contrary to both Scripture and tradition. Did the arrival of gender-neutral marriage rites slow the rate of marriage within the church? Possibly. Did a doctrinal change in the understanding of what marriage is—from an institution that forms families to something that is an expression of personal fulfillment and autonomy—reduce those rates? I think so.

Some on mainline seminary campuses now advocate for marriage contracts with an expiration date, rather than “until death do us part.” This is a concession to the culture of personal autonomy and a departure from what the church has historically understood.

In enacting the gender-neutral marriage rite, Episcopalians unilaterally redefined marriage and further distanced themselves from Christendom. There is no remaining reason why Episcopalians untethered from the church’s historic witness should cease making changes.

Something in the Water

The Episcopal Church tracks adult and child baptisms, which provide helpful numbers to understand both procreation and evangelism.

In 2019, the church reported 19,716 children and 3,866 adults baptized, down from 46,079 children and 7,773 adults in 2003, a decline of 57% and 50%, respectively.

Episcopalians have lower rates of childbearing than Americans overall, and the church is nearly 90% white—a demographic that is far below the 2.1 children-per-woman rate of replacement. Pew Research Center data indicates that the teenage children of Mainline Protestants

(including Episcopalians) are far less likely (55%) to share their parents’ faith

Some on mainline seminary campuses now advocate for marriage contracts with an expiration date, rather than “until death do us part.” This is a concession to the culture of personal autonomy...

than the children of Evangelicals (80%) or Roman Catholics (81%). A smaller percentage of a smaller number of children continue in the Episcopal Church.

Decline in adult baptisms reflects a universalist theology that pervades the church. Outreach programs common in

the Episcopal Church 20 years ago—such as Alpha—are no longer.

Why should congregants take the social risk of asking a friend or neighbor to join them at a church if there is no eternal destiny at stake? If Episcopalians do not offer something unique, but are merely an elective offering among a buffet line of equally valid “truths,” then why should people feel the need to share? If “love is love,” as rainbow-festooned church signs proclaim, what does it matter if a person knows Christ or not?

The catechized will note that *Eros* is not *Agape*, and that Jesus’ claim to be the unique Son of God commands a different level of devotion than that of a wise philosopher. But with fewer Episcopalians likely in the next 20 years, we can expect fewer will hear that message from the Episcopal Church. ✚



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

Missionary Rescued and Captors Killed

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certainly would have again, forfeited their own lives. Justice demanded the innocent captive’s freedom from his captors. Hopefully others who might have followed their path will reconsider, sparing future innocents from terror.

Likely Christian pacifists and critics of empire also lament the perceived injustice of liberation for a captive American while nationals of other weaker nations cannot hope for similar force on their behalf. The fallen world is indeed inequitable. Ideally there would be no kidnappings or terror. Ideally all governments could equally protect their citizens from malefactors.

But injustice for others doesn’t justify indifference or passivity when justice is

possible. The U.S. government has a special vocation to protect its people. It can’t offer similar exertions to all people. Its efforts on behalf of citizens like Walton hopefully widely deters malefactors to the benefit of all. U.S. power motivated Nigeria and Niger apparently to assist in Walton’s liberation. Absent American power, they would have remained indifferent or powerless. Justice was gained, whatever the motivations.

Liberation of a kidnapped young American missionary in a faraway dangerous land by SEAL Team 6 can be celebrated by all who believe in justice and protection of innocents from violence and avarice. SEAL Team 6 served America. They also served a loving and just God. ✚

Can It Really Happen Here? Review of Dreher's *Live Not by Lies*

by Kennedy Lee

“There always is this fallacious belief: ‘It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible.’ Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.”

at the time was the most authoritarian, and disturbing, experience of my life as I taxied to meet a friend at a café.

“For some reason my phone isn’t working here,” my friend texted. “If yours

later that year. *Live Not by Lies* serves as a brilliant, chilling, necessary manual for Christians who cherish freedom of speech and hope to endure a “soft” totalitarianism that has descended. It also provides a hopeful guide on how to remain steadfast in faith and convictions.

Dreher’s inspiration for the book came from friends whose parents had grown up in the Soviet bloc and believe that the anti-religious sentiments, speech policing, and self-censorship that are seen in the U.S. today resemble their past experiences. The former dissidents warn that although the West’s totalitarianism has taken on a “softer” face, it still exists.

“Are we capable of hearing them, or will we continue to rest easy in the delusion that it can’t happen here?” Dreher challenges readers.

I credit Dreher for rightfully pointing out the dangers of our culture’s new “soft” totalitarianism, but also note that we should be judicious in comparing our current “cancel” culture to the despair, torment, and epitome of human evil found in Stalin’s gulags and ensuing repression. Dissidents in this book endured a persecution unfathomable for those in the West.

Live Not by Lies tells the compelling life stories of dissidents, survivors, and courageous souls, whose example Western Christians must follow if we hope to remain steadfast in our religious convictions even in this “soft” totalitarianism. Although the topic and stories are heavy, the book assures the reader that even through dark times, Christian truth and hope remain.

From Father **Tomislav Kolaković**, a Jesuit priest who fled his native Croatia

Continued on next page



Illustration: Penguin Random House

Rod Dreher’s *Live Not by Lies* begins with this chilling **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** quote.

The words take on an amplified meaning when read in silent downtown Washington, D.C., where plywood-covered storefronts anticipated post-election violence. If this is what the democratic process now looks like in the capital of the world’s longest standing democracy, it seems that the warnings of Solzhenitsyn, the famous Soviet dissident, have been vindicated, and that Dreher’s work may be not only timely, but necessary.

Earlier this year while living in Almaty, Kazakhstan, I encountered what

stops working too, here is my current location.” When I tried to respond, her phone was offline again.

Sure enough, as I approached the city center, cellular service stopped. When I located my friend, I discovered why. Anti-government protests were underway, and the Kazakhstani government curtailed cell service so that demonstrators could not communicate.

As an American, enduring such government interference was unfathomable to me at the time. But I understood one thing—this is definitively what totalitarianism looks like—or so I thought. I had no idea what was to come in my home country

and set up an extensive underground church network in Czechoslovakia, to the Benda clan of Prague, whose large Catholic family suffered greatly under communism for speaking out on human rights, to Russian Christian dissident **Alexander Ogorodnikov**, the life stories told in this book captivate, are heartbreaking, and yet are surprisingly optimistic.

Some of Dreher's main points are truths that many American Christians unwisely disregard, but nevertheless must understand as central to our faith. The first—Christians must learn the value of suffering. In our culture of instant gratification, self-love, and feel good politics, Western Christians must relearn the importance of suffering and discomfort. Moreover, this should be done in remembrance of our predecessors globally, who were not afforded our religious liberties and suffered for living out their faith.

"Accepting suffering is the beginning of our liberation," states Dreher. This runs counter to the utopianism that totalitarian ideology promises its subjects.

"We can say clearly that this current ideology of comfort is anti-Christian in its very essence," says Father **Kaleda Kirill**, a Russian Orthodox Archpriest dedicated to the study of Soviet Christian martyrs. "But we should point out the fact that the church, not once, ever called its followers to look for suffering, and even made it clear that they are warned not to do that. But if a person finds himself in a situation where he's suffering, then he should bear it with courage."

Western Christians unready to suffer or sacrifice for their faith will easily fall under the pressure of totalitarianism, asserts Dreher.

A possible critique may be that Dreher's argument is sensationalist and meant to anger Christians over a threat that doesn't exist. Although I am hesitant to compare the West's "soft" totalitarianism to Soviet repression, recent events have validated some of Dreher's concerns. Cancel culture may be coming for Christians.

An example is *Avengers* star **Chris Pratt**, who in late October was "canceled" by some on the internet over claims that his church, Zoe Church in Los Angeles, is anti-LGBTQ+. Pratt has long been criticized by some on the left for daring to be a Christian in Hollywood.

Supreme Court Justice **Amy Coney Barrett**, during confirmation hearings, was attacked less for her judicial rulings

Live Not by Lies is a manual for understanding how politics have assumed the traditional role of religion in Western society, especially among the youth.

than her Catholic faith. Outlets such as *Newsweek* went as far as to falsely claim that Barrett's religious community, People of Praise, was inspiration for **Margaret Atwood's** dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Live Not by Lies is a manual for understanding how politics have assumed the traditional role of religion in Western society, especially among the youth.

"As **Milosz** [Polish émigré and author of *The Captive Mind*] and other dissidents testify, communism answered an essentially religious longing in the souls of restless young intellectuals," states Dreher.

This echoes what I've observed in secular peers in recent years, who I joke often follow their (overwhelmingly leftist) politics more closely than I do my own religion, even as a devout Christian.

However vast our differences with non-believers, the Soviet dissidents testify that we must keep a robust dialogue with those with whom we disagree.

"When we look at what's happening in America today, we see that you are building walls and creating gaps between

people. For us, we are always willing to speak, to talk with the other side to avoid building walls between people. You know, it is much easier to indoctrinate someone who is enclosed within a set of walls," notes **Patrik Benda**, who grew up with parents active in Bratislava's underground church scene and is one of nine children, all of who remain steadfast in their faith.

Even if our peers try to push us away, ostracize, or even cancel us for our faith or convictions, Benda's words are a necessary reminder that Western Christians must not retract from our secular peers or society. Overall, the testimony of Benda and Soviet dissidents is powerful. Their words echo much of what I've experienced and learned from pastors and friends in Russia and Kazakhstan.

The rising tide of "soft" totalitarianism in the U.S. poses an existential threat to classical liberalism and democratic values. We must, however, be cautious in comparing our current times to the repression Christians faced under Soviet totalitarianism.

We should listen to dissidents who survived repression, many of whom warn that they've seen these societal trends before. *Live Not by Lies* should be read by all Christians and Americans who cherish freedom of speech, simultaneously remembering that our Constitution, freedoms, and values—for now—ensure that it won't happen here. The most compelling takeaway from Dreher's book may be to defend these values so that we never have to worry about how to live under the alternative to freedom. ✚



Kennedy Lee is a student in the Comparative Politics of Eurasia Master's program at the Russian Higher School of Economics and holds a BA in Russian and Political Science from the University of Wisconsin-

Madison. During her undergraduate studies, Kennedy was involved with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) Initiative on Faith and Public Life, Passages Israel, and the Tikvah Fund.

United Methodist Logo's Cancellation?

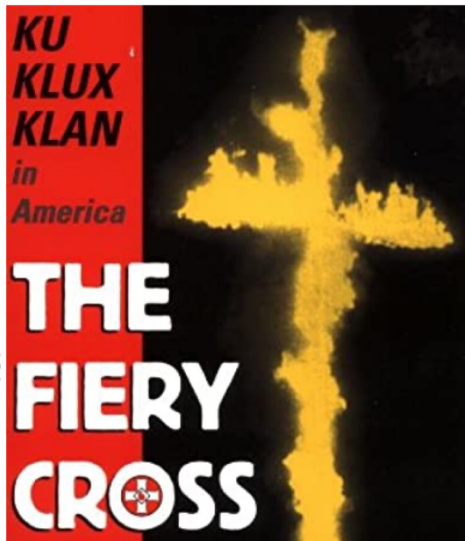
by Mark Tooley

The post-schism liberal United Methodist Church almost certainly will cancel its over 50 year old logo as “racist.” Very possibly it will also cancel the name “United Methodist” itself as racist, chauvinistic, and homophobic.

A July United Methodist News Service column by a Texas pastor who opposes the logo said:

But when I saw the United Methodist Cross and Flame, I didn't think of John Wesley's heart being strangely

U.S. traditionalists who plan to join the new traditionalist global Methodist denomination emerging from next year's schism had accepted that remaining liberals would inherit the current denominational bureaucracy including the name and logo. For some U.S. traditionalists, the name and logo, crafted in 1968, represent a failed experiment resulting in theological confusion, endless ecclesial battles, and more than three million lost members.



The United Methodist “cross and flame” logo has been compared to the burning cross of the Ku Klux Klan. (Image: The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America by Wyn Wade)

warmed, I didn't think of the flaming tongues of fire resting on the Apostles in Acts, I didn't think of how each tongue of the flame represents the former denominations that came together to form The United Methodist Church—The Evangelical United Brethren and The Methodist Church. My mind went back to that burning cross I saw on the side of the freeway—a symbol my mother told me was devised to cause fear in black people.

In September the North Texas Annual Conference voted by 76% to advocate replacing the cross and flame denominational symbol appearing outside most of over 30,000 churches in the U.S. and many thousands more overseas.

United Methodists in Africa, who account currently for nearly half the global denomination and likely will comprise two thirds of the new traditionalist denomination, are more fond of the name and logo. Under its banner they've gained millions of members, become a global force, and represent throughout Africa a church renowned there for evangelism, education, and ministries of social welfare. Partly for these reasons, many Africans initially opposed the Protocol agreed upon late last year to divide United Methodism. Since then African leaders have accepted the Protocol while hoping their churches in Africa could somehow retain the logo and name even as they align with the new global Methodist denomination.

United Methodists in Africa are a deeply praying people. When they pray, get out of the way. We saw the results of their prayers at last year's Special General Conference when liberal efforts to overturn the church's marriage teaching were defeated. No doubt United Methodists in Africa have been praying somehow to retain the logo and perhaps the name. Their prayers are unsurprisingly being answered.

To my knowledge, there's not yet any major initiative for post schism liberal United Methodism to replace the name. But in the current U.S. political climate, when the past is sweepingly denounced and cancelled for failing to abide by contemporary progressive ideals, the move seems inevitable. United Methodism since its founding by merger of two denominations in 1968 has been hyper-liberal theologically and politically. But it woefully failed to attain full progressive demands of 2020.

At next year's General Conference, United Methodism will effectively end after 53 years. Rest In Peace. The two or more new denominations will have distinct new identities. There will be the global Methodist church focused on traditional doctrine, ethics, and evangelism. There will be a liberal mostly U.S. Methodist church that is Mainline Protestant, permissive on doctrine and ethics, while seeking to retain a meaningful Christian self-identification aligned with other progressive denominations like the Episcopal Church and Presbyterian Church USA. Likely there will also be a new liberationist Methodist body impatient with the progressive church and preferring a more radical approach. Each of these communions will have their own names and logos, presumably.

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

It will be a sad time of division and admission of past failure. But it will also be an exciting opportunity for new beginnings in which each perspective will be free to live out and advocate its version of Methodism.

The liberal and liberationist Methodist bodies will almost certainly replicate

the demographic decline plaguing similar denominations in America and globally. But we can be hopeful that traditional global Methodism, with leadership from growing African churches, will have a very different and brighter future.

Methodism's future will not include, at least in the U.S., the cross and flame logo

of 1968, and ultimately probably not the name "United Methodist." Both represent in America a form of mid-20th century vague Protestantism that lost energy and purpose decades ago. New symbols and names will represent a renewed form of Methodism to a world that still needs what traditional Methodism uniquely offers. ✚

IRD Diary: Flogging White Evangelicals

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policies of a disliked president—collaboration with the depreciation of human life?

What about the alternative—supporting a disreputable man whose policies would compound the conditions that subvert human flourishing? Doesn't this also make one an accomplice to sustained suffering while compromising Christian integrity? How is this more honorable?

Dalrymple doesn't say.

He then says, "I say these things not to shame my brothers and sisters who feel otherwise but so that they can understand my heart. I believe the evangelical alignment with the Trump administration has advanced the kingdoms of men but not the kingdom of God."

I think it's so people know his heart *and* to distance himself from those whom he shames.

However, this overly broad statement ignores some of the administration's achievements. Do members of the Church Remnant think the following are *only* advancing "the kingdoms of men"?

- Saving lives through increased support for mental—and behavioral—health needs
- Protecting vulnerable newborn and infant children
- Blocking property of certain persons with respect to the conventional arms activities of Iran
- Combating race and sex stereotyping
- Lowering drug prices
- Targeting Opportunity Zones and other distressed communities
- Improving rural health and telehealth access

- Increasing drug importation to lower prices for American patients
- Strengthening the Child Welfare System for America's children
- Safe Policing for Safe Communities (an executive order signed by President Trump in June 2020 that financially incentivizes police departments to improve officer recruitment and retention practices, recruit from communities they patrol, encourage more limited use of deadly force, and prioritize using social workers and mental health professionals for nonviolent calls rather than police officers)
- Combating human trafficking and online child exploitation in the United States
- The prevention of international human trafficking
- The First Step Act (this is the Formerly Incarcerated Reenter Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person Act, a bipartisan criminal justice bill passed by the 115th Congress and signed by President Trump in December 2018, that reforms federal prisons and sentencing laws in order to reduce recidivism, decrease the federal inmate population, and maintain public safety)

One can make sound arguments about the moral and political legitimacy or longevity of executive orders. But those would be separate arguments altogether.

Are these policies simply relegated to the city of man rather than a measurable contribution to the transcendent causes

of human development and flourishing? I'm not advancing the idea that government should be the primary vehicle for charity. But supporting these policies, in part, reflects a moral obligation that permits provisions for those in need. Would Christians have more integrity in the absence of these dispensations? How? Again, if Christians don't seize the opportunity to influence action to improve or save lives, how is our moral and political witness advanced?

There's also the possibility that the beneficiaries of these actions will not just thank the president; they will also thank his Christian supporters. They may thank God for answering prayers that alleviated substantial burdens that significantly complicated their lives. Some of the recipients might become fellow brothers and sisters in Christ because these policies have allowed—and are allowing—Christians on the ground in their immediate environments to be the "salt of the earth."

Can this conspicuous logic regarding Trump also be applied to the Rev. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**? King's public ministry in pursuit of civil rights was positively significant. But he repeatedly and perniciously violated Christian sexual ethics in his private life.

How do Dalrymple and Church Remnant deal with King?

I don't necessarily doubt Dalrymple's charitability here, despite his sanctimony. His evaluation is a marginally more reasonable example of white evangelicals condemning fellow white evangelicals for supporting the president—a practice that's exhausted itself. ✚

IRD Diary:

Flogging White Evangelicals

by Derryck Green

Christianity Today published a pre-election piece in which **Timothy Dalrymple**—president and CEO of the publication—explained the political divisions among white evangelicals concerning U.S. President Donald Trump.

The foundation of his analysis was the response to former editor **Mark Galli's** December 2019 editorial in which Galli argued for the impeachment and removal of the president from office.

According to Dalrymple, reactions to Galli divided themselves into two cohorts. The first he labeled the “Church Remnant” for what he suggests is its devoted pursuit of political power and influence—conflating these with the Kingdom of God.

He says the decline of Christian influence in America and across the globe,

“...led them to support a politician who contradicts Christian values in his personal behavior but, they believed, advanced Christian values in the public square. They did not admire his personality or condone his rhetoric, but they believed he and [his party] would usher in the greatest good for society as a whole.”

The other collection of evangelicals he calls the “Church Remnant.” This group is,

“...captivated by a fundamentally different vision of the kingdom of God. The kingdom...is too sacred to be confused with winning elections and passing laws. It is not a political dispensation or social order.

It is not a kingdom of this world. Instead, the kingdom breaks into time and space when men and women sent by the king seek the lost and serve the



Schoolmaster Flogging Tom Sawyer by Norman Rockwell.

least. The kingdom of heaven is among us when we speak the gospel in word and deed, serve the homeless and the refugee, and come alongside our suffering neighbors.”

Dalrymple places himself firmly on the side of Church Remnant. In treating what he sees as the fault line among white evangelicals, he disparages the assumed motivations of the group with which he disagrees precisely because of *whom* the group supported.

For example, he says,

“...the Church Remnant places a higher priority on the purity of the church than the prosperity of the country. National prosperity matters, but nations flower and fall while the church endures into eternity. Its unity and integrity bear witness to the divine character of Christ...and cannot be compromised. This makes the Church Remnant more sanguine about the loss of cultural and political influence...”

Some evangelicals do fall into this category; however, the legitimacy of his broad application isn't as concrete as Dalrymple suggests. Considering the rhetoric from the Church Remnant during the previous four years, the importance is less on protecting the integrity of the church and more about safeguarding the *moral superiority* of the Remnant's congregation by rejecting the president *and those who support him*. That is, this pre-tentious declaration was meant to draw clear distinctions between the unrighteous and the self-righteous.

Supporting a dishonorable man whose policies have contributed to the expansion of human flourishing—in our country and others—has less to do with an unquenched thirst for power or influence and more to do with helping “our suffering neighbors.”

Consequently, does supporting policies that lead to an improved quality of life precipitate a loss of religious/Christian integrity? Isn't remaining silent and unmoved in this regard— withholding support for preferential

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Derryck Green has an undergraduate degree in Religious Studies, an M.A. in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a Doctorate in Theology and Ministry from Azusa Pacific University.



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