

## Woke Church Militant in D.C.

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Protesters march in front of the White House in 2011 on behalf of those in South Sudan. See "IRD Diary" on page 16 for more about peaceful protests. (Photo: Faith McDonnell/IRD)

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**Cover:** A woman in Washington, D.C., is surrounded by protesters insisting that she raise her fist in a show of support for their movement on August 26, 2020 (Photo: R.A.R.E. TV YouTube screen capture)

# Woke Church Militant in D.C.

The Woke Church Militant marched in Washington, D.C., this summer, but it wasn't a traditional church procession and marchers weren't singing hymns.

An ostensibly "anti-racist" crowd of about 150 marched through a popular restaurant district, demanding outdoor diners join them with raised fist salutes. Videos showed several diners declined, prompting marchers to confront them with angry jeers.

In one scene, a 49 year old woman is surrounded by shouting, raised-fist marchers, demanding she pay them homage. She quietly declines. Afterwards she told *Washington Post* she had herself joined Black Lives Matters demonstrations. But here, "I felt I was under attack." She didn't want to surrender to intimidation. "In the moment, it didn't feel right. I wasn't actually frightened."

One angry woman marcher shouted at her: "Are you a Christian?" There was no answer.

I hope if I'd been there that I would've been as brave as that woman and not surrendered to the contemptuous mob. Raised fists don't signal good will but intimidation, anger, and riotous groupthink. Most riots and groupthink these days aren't in street theater but social media, politics, and wider public discourse. Defying its demands for conformity is increasingly difficult.

This mob mentality is effectively The Woke Church Militant, full of infallible though constantly evolving dogma that tolerates no heresy. Apostates must be punished. The Spanish Inquisition at least offered its victims the opportunity to repent. Woke Church doesn't believe in mercy or forgiveness.

Woke Church is an attitude and a movement. Some Christians and other traditional religious people subscribe. They conform their traditional religious institutions to Woke demands, which include apologizing for traditional religion's presumed countless sins against woke justice.

**Carl Trueman** wrote "Woke Repentance" (*First Things*, 8/25/20) about woke religionists seeking worldly approval through apologies:

*Today, one needs barely glance at Christian Twitter to see endless repentance for the sins that the world regards as top priority. One finds many horizontal repentances directed toward other men and women, but little that is directed heavenward. Not many repentant racists use the language of "against you, you only, have I sinned" when they mull over past bigotry to which their churches, or maybe even themselves, have been party. And that is interesting.*

And:

*I wonder if today's turmoil is partly due to the fact that much of this current repentance is but hokey wokeness, selective in the sins it calls out—and selective on the basis of what the world thinks is important.*

Trueman focused on wokery within churches. But Woke Church is primarily an alternative to traditional religion, especially among "religious nones" who're typically post-Christian in some sense. Often they're people who two generations ago

would have nominally identified with Mainline Protestantism. But today they're unaffiliated and perhaps spiritual but supposedly not religious.

Yet often these post-Christian Wokesters are very religious, with doctrines, sacraments, soteriology, demonology, and cosmology. For them, the path of salvation is as straight and narrow as for the most exacting traditional churches.

**Jody Bottum** in his book *An Anxious Age* said this mostly post-Protestant phenomenon possesses "an intense spiritual hunger that has no outlet":

*There's no way to see people kneeling, or singing 'Hands up, don't shoot,' or swaying while they hold up candles, and avoid acknowledging that it's driven by a spiritual desire. I perceived this when I wrote about Occupy Wall Street, and it's become even more like this. It is an intense spiritual hunger that is manifesting itself more violently. Because to the post-Protestants, the world is an outrage and we are all sinners.*

And:

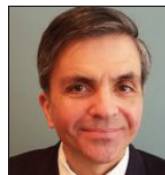
*These ideas used to be corralled in the churches. If you let an idea like Original Sin—that's a dangerous and powerful idea—loose from its corral, it goes to a place where it can exist, which is politics. One of the great dangers is that religious ideas are in politics.*

Traditional churches teach salvation through Christ. But Woke Church seeks salvation through politically correct views on social ills. Says Bottum:

*If it's all about social ills, then you know you are a good person if you are opposed to those social ills, if you are anti-racist, even if you don't do anything. You are convinced of your own salvation. You are one of the Elect if you adopt this stance of being opposed to the great sins.*

The Woke Church Militant marching through D.C. harassing heretical diners was seeking salvation. But they won't find it where they're looking, which only will increase their anxiety and anger. ☩

*Mark Tooley*



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



# Trump Critic Episcopal Bishop Prays at Democratic Convention

A bishop who criticized U.S. President **Donald Trump** for using St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., as a photo backdrop in June was tapped to offer a prayer at the Democratic National Convention.

Episcopal Diocese of Washington Bishop **Mariann Budde** offered the closing benediction by prerecorded video on the night of Tuesday, August 18. The convention mostly occurred virtually.

"I am outraged," Budde told the *Washington Post* in June about Trump's posturing before St. John's parish with Bible in hand. "Everything he has said and done is to inflame violence. We need moral leadership, and he's done everything to divide us."

Budde herself acknowledged in an interview with the *Washington Post* that her selection for the Democratic convention was likely an acknowledgment of her public criticism of the President.

"It's not like someone said, 'Oh, who was that nice bishop who was at the back of the McCain funeral procession?'"

Budde quipped in the *Post* interview ahead of the convention, referring to the Washington National Cathedral service for the late senator in 2018.

Budde's criticism brought her appearances on CNN and ABC's *Good Morning America* program, in addition to the *Washington Post*. In June, Budde told ABC News, "I've given up speaking to Pres. Trump. We need to replace President Trump."

The bishop's evening benediction emphasized the positive and made no mention of the incumbent, instead quoting Religious Left luminary and peace activist **William Sloan Coffin**: "May God give you the grace never to sell yourself short, grace to do something big for something good, grace to remember that the world is too dangerous now for anything but truth and too small for anything but love."

"And now may the blessing of God, the source of all goodness, truth and love inspire you, inspire us all to realize Dr. [Martin Luther] King's dream of the beloved community, Congressman [John]

Lewis' dream of a just society, President Lincoln's dream of a more perfect union in this country, in our time," Budde concluded.

The Washington, D.C.-based bishop has a long history of political engagement, advocating to restrict firearms and more recently to publicly side with the Black Lives Matter movement. Theologically, she presided over a diocesan convention calling "to avoid the use of gendered pronouns for God" and consecrated a chapel at St. Thomas' Episcopal Parish named for gay retired Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire **Gene Robinson**.

Budde was the only Mainline Protestant listed in the DNC program, which included progressive Roman Catholic figures Jesuit Fr. **James Martin** and Sr. **Simone Campbell** of the liberal social justice lobby NETWORK. National Latino Evangelical Coalition founder the Rev. **Gabriel Salguero** also spoke.

Republicans invited Cardinal **Timothy M. Dolan** of New York, who prayed at both major party conventions in 2012, to deliver an opening prayer at the Republican National Convention August 24. Dolan's prayer emphasized vulnerable populations including the elderly, immigrants and refugees, the unborn, and those facing persecution for their faith.

"As we ask your hand, Almighty Father, upon this convention and the nominees of both parties, and his wisdom upon an electorate so eager to perform its duty of faithful citizenship," Dolan concluded. "Pray we do, for we dare claim 'In God we Trust.'" ✚

*Bishop Mariann Budde of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington offers a closing benediction to the second night of the Democratic National Convention held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on August 18, 2020 (Photo: Democratic National Convention video screencapture)*





Presbyterian Church (USA) commissioners at the denomination's 223rd General Assembly held in St. Louis, Mo. (Photo: CBN News)

## Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly May Conclude

Legislative gatherings in which thousands of Presbyterians fill a convention hall in a host city may cease to occur, according to a top official with the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The Rev. **J. Herbert Nelson II**, stated clerk of the PC(USA) General Assembly, doesn't predict the end of the PC(USA)'s highest legislative body itself, rather he says the denomination "cannot continue" to hold "the big tent General Assembly"—the ones in which "we have people from all over coming in and spending six, seven, eight days at a general assembly and utilizing that in a big arena."

Nelson's somber warning is an example of how mainline decline in the pews has worked its way up to the national church with a significant consequence for denominational governance, and it is likely not limited to the PC(USA).

The denomination's summer 2020 gathering, scheduled to take place in

Baltimore, met online due to COVID restrictions and a pared-back legislative schedule. Rather than being an exception, the limited gathering may signal things to come, even after restrictions are lifted.

The PC(USA) shed membership for decades, limiting revenue that reaches church headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky. That office has already seen staff reductions going back to the 2011 decision to delete the denomination's "fidelity and chastity" standard, which stated that Presbyterian clergy should be faithful in marriage or celibate in the single life. Then in 2014 the denomination permitted local presbyteries to allow their clergy to preside at same-sex marriage ceremonies. Both of those decisions contributed to an ongoing denominational exodus of churches and individuals that has been documented each year in the reported statistics. The denomination has also adopted positions uniquely

critical of Israel and has dramatically shifted to an embrace of leftist political causes.

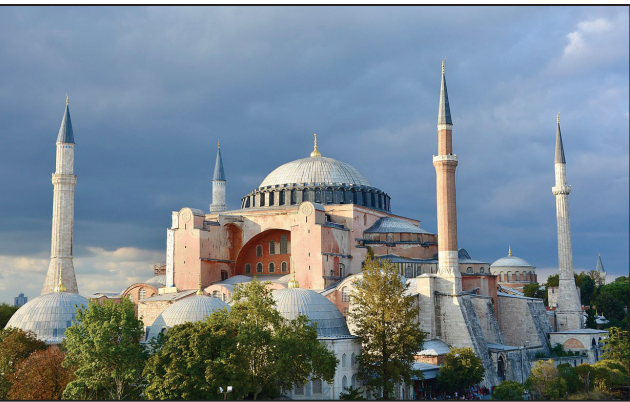
Revisionist caucus groups argued that removing expectations for clergy sexual conduct were essential to remaining relevant amidst changing American culture and for the inclusion of new members. That predicted influx of progressives has not arrived, while more conservative Presbyterian bodies grew as they attracted former PC(USA) congregations.

The biannual General Assembly is funded through an assessment paid from congregations based upon reported membership size. Even as the PC(USA) has increased that per-capita rate, the sinking numbers have drawn down total revenue.

Denominational officials shrugged off the decline for years. Nelson declared in 2017: "We are not dying. We are Reforming." ✚

# Faith Leaders React to Hagia Sophia Mosque Conversion

**H**agia Sophia, the historic Church of Holy Wisdom, has been re-designated from a museum into a mosque following an announcement by Turkish President **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** on July 10.



Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey (Photo: Adli Wahid / Wikimedia Creative Commons)

Church officials, particularly those of Orthodox faiths, denounced the move and appealed to the Turkish government for a reversal.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), which counts 350 member churches globally, including mainline Protestant denominations, voiced hope that the UNESCO World Heritage Site would be restored to the “emblematic unifying role” it has served since 1934.

“By deciding to convert the Hagia Sophia back to a mosque you have reversed that positive sign of Turkey’s openness and changed it to a sign of exclusion and division,” wrote interim WCC head **Ioan Sauca**, the first Orthodox Christian to hold the role, in a public letter sent to Erdoğan expressing “grief and dismay.”

Protestant and Roman Catholic officials also objected.

“Turning [Hagia Sophia] back into a mosque is not only a return to divisive

history but an erasure of a living religious and spiritual expression,” wrote Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Presiding Bishop **Elizabeth Eaton**.

“My thoughts go to Istanbul. I think of Santa Sophia and I am very pained,” shared **Pope Francis** in a recent Vatican service.

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Archbishop **Elpidophoros** implored believers to speak with neighbors, friends, and elected leaders, whom he hopes will “protest by every means possible.” He added that Hagia Sophia “should be allowed to retain its status quo as a place of encounter for Christians and Muslims.”

The massive 6th century cathedral, built in Constantinople (now Istanbul) during the reign of Emperor **Justinian I**, served as a center of the Eastern Church for nearly a millennium. Sultan **Mehmed II** changed it into a mosque following Ottoman conquest in 1453. Father

of modern secular Turkey President **Kemal Atatürk** re-opened it as a museum in 1935, allowing the uncovering and restoration of Christian art.

Erdoğan’s decision reclassifying Hagia Sophia as a mosque came after Turkey’s high administrative court annulled the 1934 decision that turned the site into a museum. Popular with Erdoğan’s nationalist base, the move dismayed Turks who desire a secular, pluralist state.

Responding to criticism, Erdoğan argued against the idea that this move would sow division among people of different faiths, saying: “Like all of our other mosques, the doors of Hagia Sophia will be open to all, locals or foreigners, Muslims and non-Muslims.”

Turkish officials sought to reframe the decision, with Turkish Foreign Minister **Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu** arguing use of Hagia Sophia as a mosque does not diminish the site’s broad cultural value: “We have to protect our ancestors’ heritage. The function can be this way or that way—it does not matter.” ✚

## Sudan Surprise: Separation of Religion and State

**L**eaders in Sudan’s transitional government have moved to advance religious freedom in the east African nation.

Prime Minister **Abdalla Hamdok** and General **Abdalaziz Adam Alhilu** signed an agreement September 3 guaranteeing rights that, until recently, most Sudanese could only dream of attaining.

Sudan has entered into a period of reform following decades of Islamist rule under former President **Omar al-Bashir**, who was ousted in 2019 following nationwide protests. Sudan’s transitional leaders have sought the removal of sanctions by western governments.

The declaration of principles included:

- Recognition and accommodation for Sudan’s racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity
- Political and social equality of all people guaranteed by law
- A democratic state with separation of religion and state or—alternatively—the right to self-determination
- Self-protection, until separation of religion and state is actualized, for the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State
- Cessation of hostilities on both sides
- Power sharing among all the peoples of Sudan to be included in the new constitution

*Continued on next page*

## After Tragic Accident, Methodist Bishop John Yambasu Leaves Lasting Legacy

A key leader in the global United Methodist Church has died following a car accident. Bishop **John Yambasu** of Sierra Leone passed less than two weeks before his 64th birthday. He is survived by his wife **Millicent** and five children. Yambasu was prominent for his role earlier this year in convening a key group of United Methodists from across different constituencies in seeking a solution to intractable denominational conflict. The group negotiated a proposal to end decades of increasingly bitter infighting, called the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.”

Bishop of Sierra Leone in West Africa since 2009, Yambasu later was elected president of the Council of Churches of Sierra Leone. The Candler School of Theology-educated bishop also held numerous leadership positions beyond his own country: president of the African College of Bishops, chancellor of Africa University in Zimbabwe, and vice president of the General Board of Global Ministries.

Under his leadership, the United Methodist Church in Sierra Leone was a force to be reckoned with: it counts more than 285,000 members, 450 primary and high schools, several medical facilities, and has reportedly been the country’s largest Protestant denomination. The Sierra Leone Annual Conference broke new ground by planting a church in a majority-Muslim area three years ago, with Yambasu preaching at the dedication service. That same year, the bishop saw a dream of his realized with the establishment of the United Methodist University in Sierra Leone.

As bishop, Yambasu confronted daunting problems. These included protesting election violence, speaking out against tribe-based divisiveness in the church, chairing a major interfaith campaign to combat a deadly Ebola outbreak in West Africa, and defending biblical faithfulness in sexual morality. Yambasu also sought to promote greater financial self-sufficiency for his conference, recognizing the dangers and unsustainability of (in 2017) 95 percent of the money for its pastors’ salaries originating from outside of Sierra Leone.

“It took Bishop Yambasu’s remarkable leadership in bringing different parties to the table that led to us finally having a framework for peace,” wrote UMAAction Director and elected General Conference Delegate **John Lomperis**. “United Methodists across the theological spectrum owe the late bishop a debt of gratitude for all that he did to constructively lead us towards a truly sustainable ‘way forward.’” ✚



Bishop John Yambasu, with microphone, at the opening of Wesley United Methodist Church in Pujehun, southern Sierra Leone (photo: Phileas Jusu / UMNS)

“A joint agreement for separation of religion and state is the most significant advance for religious freedom to date in the new (post-Bashir) Sudan,” writes IRD Religious Liberty Director **Faith J.H. McDonnell**.

Incremental change had already begun, but the Joint Agreement came as a surprise to diplomats and negotiators engaged in Sudan peace talks in Juba, the

capital of neighboring South Sudan.

Hamdok, former Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, has expressed his desire for the nation, long governed by Arabic peoples in Khartoum, to have equality for all.

The declaration that Sudan “shall not establish an official religion” follows decades of rule by officials who elevated

a strict Wahhabism interpretation of Sunni Islam to the exclusion of other branches

of Islam as well as Christianity. Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, will strongly object.

Alhilu insisted across years of on-and-off peace talks that the Nuba people of which he is a part will not acquiesce to a Sharia state, instead requiring individual, social, and political freedom within Sudan—or right to self-determination.

State discrimination based upon race, ethnicity, and culture are also dismantled. Sudan’s marginalized peoples, including but not limited to the indigenous black population of the western Darfur region, suffered cultural extermination and genocide for decades. ✚

The people in Kauda, Nuba Mountains gather in Freedom Square to celebrate the Declaration of Principles. (Photo credit: Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North)



# Why It Matters Jen Hatmaker Endorses Her Daughter's Homosexuality

by Chelsen Vicari

The podcast episode is raw and heart-breaking. Christian author and women's conference speaker **Jen Hatmaker** invited daughter Sydney to discuss her homosexuality and spirituality. The discussion was part of the "A Moment of Pride" series on Hatmaker's "For the Love" podcast.

various Christian perspectives on same-sex marriage," Sydney recounted.

That article mentioned those who were "loving, but unaffirming" and then linked to an article written by Jen Hatmaker at the time. Sydney said, after that moment, "I didn't touch a Bible for years."

The words of Romans 1:32 are striking: "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."

We all deserve death because of our sin. Only because Christ paid our debts do we have life. But Paul's letter to the Romans warns those who disregard moral law and the deadly effects of sin.

In Hatmaker's podcast we hear this happen in our own time. A popular Christian mother doesn't recognize sin and even apologizes for once affirming moral law.

The love discussed by Jen and Sydney is genuine. As a mother of two, I feel compassion for Hatmaker. To think of my daughter scared and confused because of her attractions is unbearable. So I'm trying to approach this discussion with gentleness.

Yet, it is painful to listen as there is no recognition of wrong.

It is heartbreaking to hear of parents who deny relationship with their kids because of sin. To threaten or abandon a child who struggles with same-sex attraction is not the answer, either.

Hatmaker has strong influence on young Christian moms. Her words and actions are effective, whether we like them or not. How she approaches her daughter's sexuality will influence a cohort of young moms, many of whom attend conservative evangelical churches.

I have little authority to speak on parenting young adults, and so I proceed cautiously.

Christian leaders (with more authority than I) should sound the alarm. But

*Continued on page 15*



Sydney and Jen Hatmaker (Photo: jenhatmaker.com)

"This is like a known fact in our family, and has been," Hatmaker prefaced. "This is not new news."

Sydney recognized lesbian attractions around 12 years old, identifying her sexuality from "representation of gay people just in movies and stuff."

She admits to struggling with confusion and doing her own comprehensive Bible study to understand perspectives.

"One of the first resources that I found was just this person talking about

Hatmaker regrets not sooner reconciling homosexuality and Christianity.

"It will just always be my greatest sadness that Dad and I did not do our own work early enough so that you felt safe and beloved in your own family," Hatmaker wrote. "We weren't talking deeply about what we were learning and processing in front of you, and thus left you alone, and vulnerable, and scared.

"I'm so glad you're gay, I'm so proud that you are free. I love that this is how you were made," Hatmaker concluded.



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



# Canceling Jim Wallis

by Mark Tooley

Sojourners President and former Editor-in-Chief Jim Wallis speaks about his book *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* in 2015 (Photo: Sojourners)



**J**im Wallis, age 72, is a venerable Religious Left patriarch, having founded what became *Sojourners* magazine, originally called *The Post-American*, in 1971. Now Wallis has stepped down as *Sojourners* editor after deleting an article accusing Roman Catholicism of rampant racism. His attempt prompted two other editors publicly to resign. The restored article is called “The Catholic Church Has a Visible White Power Faction.”

Wallis, who identifies as Evangelical Left, has often sought alliance with liberal Catholics, such as with his “Call to Renewal” coalition founded in the 1990s. More recently his “Circle of Protection” included the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to lobby for federal funding of social welfare programs and for more permissive immigration policy.

*Sojourners* “White Power” article originally alleged that a 2018 U.S. Catholic bishops’ anti-racism statement declined to condemn swastikas, Confederate flags, and nooses. Wallis, noting the bishops had cited swastikas and nooses, removed the article as inaccurate. He explained it was “offensive” and included “unwarranted insinuations and allegations against many Catholics, many in leadership, including the bishops, and within the wider Catholic Church who are working toward and are committed to racial justice.”

A second explanation from Wallis further explained “the article too closely linked the words, actions, and ideologies of individuals and groups to the leadership of the Catholic Church.” He committed to “confronting white supremacy and white nationalism.”

Wallis’s third explanation cited “outrage” from “our dearest, closest, and long-term progressive Catholic allies,”

including Catholic bishops and “progressive national Catholic organizations.” He said the article was “misleading and inflammatory.” The article’s “whole foundation” for suggesting the Catholic bishops were, in its words, “harboring a culture of hate” was unsubstantiated.

Although Wallis diplomatically tried to praise its author’s “scholarship,” the article was mostly polemics and insinuation, claiming remote Catholic ties to white supremacism and the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally, while ominously referencing Catholics such as **Milo Yiannopoulos**, **Pat Buchanan**, **Steve Bannon**, and **Kellyanne Conway**.

Wallis sensibly recognized the article as incoherent and conspiratorial without evidently realizing that postmodern intersectionality disdains linear reason in favor of drawing ideological lines connecting all sinister oppressions.

So in a fourth statement, recognizing his transgression, Wallis begged “forgiveness for my errors and sins,” from all who had been offended by the article or its removal. A subsequent statement announced Wallis was no longer *Sojourners* magazine editor-in-chief but remains as *Sojourners* president.

One of the editors who resigned then complained via Twitter: “The 2 editors of color who resigned from *Sojourners* for its lack of integrity & ethical treatment have not received an apology or concrete amends from Jim Wallis or *Sojourners*.” The other editor had tweeted: “Three years of experiencing this toxic environment as a Dalit woman/WOC [woman of color] + recent events is the reason why I decided to leave.”

Another former editor, who now works for an Ohio religious abortion rights group, tweeted in support of her former colleagues: “As a former editor for @Sojourners magazine, I affirm this

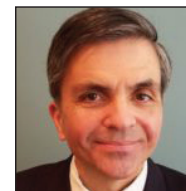
decision to remove JW as editor-in-chief. It’s been long overdue, but it only occurred after two POC [people of color] editors publicly resigned.” She added: “More than that, though, this is the collateral damage of white supremacy—even among our beloved progressive communities.”

Several *Sojourners* writers have declared they no longer will contribute, with one saying: “I’ve written for @Sojourners but I’ve since resolved to not write for them. There are too many restrictions on content—on LGBTQ, abortion, race—due to fear from the top about being divisive.”

For many years Wallis has often been careful about abortion and sex so as not to impair relations with Catholics and theologically orthodox Evangelicals who share his liberal politics. He says he wants to reduce abortion but opposes legal restrictions. For much of the last decade he has backed same-sex marriage, at odds with Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism.

As his critics of late have noted, Wallis is “an old white man” who’s not keeping up with fast-moving woke culture. Can he at age 72 adapt to the latest intersectionalist political demands? Will he pivot away from 20 years of seeking mainstream legitimacy to align with the very latest street activism and online zeal?

Or is Wallis’s stepping back from *Sojourners* magazine the first step in his ongoing cancellation by an increasingly frenzied woke culture, whose fiercest fire is often aimed at longtime progressives? ❖



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

# How Liberal Is American United Methodism?

by John Lomperis



Controversial lesbian activist Karen Oliveto (second left) and three Western Jurisdiction bishops, all subsidized by apportionments from outside of their jurisdiction (Photo: Mike DuBose, UMNS)

Rhetoric from both liberal propagandists as well as discouraged conservatives portrays the U.S. portion of the global United Methodist Church as overwhelmingly and increasingly liberal, with conservative believers reduced to a tiny minority.

Undoubtedly, there is more liberalism in the USA than in most other regions of our global denomination.

And it is important to acknowledge uncomfortable facts for traditionalist believers: The elite leadership of American United Methodism—including official UMC seminaries (with the important exception of United) and denominational-agency bureaucrats—is overwhelmingly committed to a liberal Protestant ethos. The clear majority of American bishops and General Conference delegates favor liberalizing church standards on sexual morality. The spring 2019 delegate elections showed a powerfully organized liberal backlash against the February 2019 General Conference’s adoption of the Traditional Plan. The overall results of these elections put liberal caucuses in a strong position for bishop elections in all five U.S. jurisdictions, including the previously more conservative Southeast.

But it is also true that in the larger picture, American United Methodism is a lot more divided than selectively focusing on the above information would suggest. There are many more traditionalist believers within American United Methodist congregations than liberal elites sometimes imagine from within their ideological echo chambers.

In 2015, soon after a narrow majority of the U.S. Supreme Court imposed a radical redefinition of the institution of marriage in civil law, United Methodist Communications (UMCom) commissioned

a survey of United Methodists asking whether the UMC should follow secular American culture’s embrace of same-sex marriage. It found that 54 percent of pastors, 54 percent of the most-involved laypeople, and 41 percent of the least-involved laypeople still supported the rules in our denomination’s governing *Book of Discipline* forbidding “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions.”

Then in 2019, UMCom released another study of American United Methodists’ beliefs (without directly addressing sexuality). It found that 44 percent of American United Methodist lay members identify their theology as conservative or traditionalist, 28 percent as moderate/centrist, and only 20 percent as progressive/liberal, with eight percent unsure. It found church attendance was significantly more frequent among conservatives/traditionalists. **Chuck Niedringhaus**, UMCom’s research director, further explained, “I don’t think you can add the moderates and progressives and say that’s where the church is,” because “[t]heologically, many (moderates) are more traditional.” On core doctrinal disputes we have had in recent years, the survey found some notable conservative majorities, with 70 percent believing “in a literal hell,” 72 percent believing that “the only way to salvation is through a relationship with Jesus,” and 84 percent believing in the virgin birth of Christ, while only 18 percent accept the Universalist heresy that “All people will die saved.”

Elected General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates have important powers, including electing new American bishops, but exclusive focus upon such elites distorts the bigger picture. In the last round of delegate elections we saw multiple instances of liberal bishops and their representatives heavy-handedly

taking actions to effectively bolster the liberal side. But our winner-take-all system allows organized blocs of majorities as slim as 51 percent to determine every elected slot. As a result, several annual conferences have elected entirely or mostly liberal groups of delegates, despite these conferences’ including large and vibrant evangelical minorities.

While 99 percent of United Methodists are laity and it is widely agreed that in the United States, laity are significantly more conservative than clergy, the *Discipline* requires equal numbers of lay and clergy delegates. And many licensed local pastors, who are generally conservative, are not allowed to vote. The result is that delegate elections systematically over-represent more liberal clergy. Furthermore, the much-noted liberal gains in spring 2019 delegate elections, compared to the last round of elections, were entirely among clergy. There were no net losses in the percentage of theological traditionalists elected among American lay delegates.

Misleading propaganda is being spread by liberal caucus figures. The strident “Mainstream UMC” caucus has been distributing a map color-coding the United States according to which annual conferences are allegedly “against the Traditional Plan.” This widely shared map claims Louisiana and Indiana among those conferences “reject[ing] the Traditional Plan,” apparently based on the fact

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

# 'Strictly Nonpartisan' Lutheran and Episcopal Lobbies Still Firmly on the Political Left

by Jeffrey H. Walton

Americans are navigating twin pandemics of COVID-19 and white supremacy, according to Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop **Michael Curry**.

"We've seen the ugly face of hatred and bigotry and of white supremacy in the murder of **George Floyd**," Curry noted in a July 9 web conference hosted in conjunction with officials from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). "We must find a better way in the same way of love for neighbor that will help us through the biological pandemic can help us navigate the sociological one."

Curry and his Lutheran counterpart, ELCA Presiding Bishop **Elizabeth Eaton**, spoke about their respective denominations' engagement on public policy, the role of Christians in the public square, and how Lutherans and Episcopalians can best advocate in the political space.

## 'Start Local'

The online seminar attracted more than 2,400 participants according to ELCA Director of Advocacy **Amy Reumann**. Bishops' comments were followed by staff presentations from the Episcopal Office of Government Relations and ELCA Advocacy.

"The work of both of our offices is strictly nonpartisan," Reumann maintained, insisting that they reflect a diversity of opinion in the pews and are in accord with legal guidelines.

Asked how churches and clergy could engage in advocacy amidst congregations of diverse political views, Bishop Eaton advised "starting local" with food pantries, clothes closets, or community gardens.

Some Episcopalians and Lutherans did not see nonpartisanship. Eaton recalled soon after the presidential inauguration, an ELCA bishop fielded a call from a parishioner upset with clergy



Officials from the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America participate in a webinar about public policy advocacy on July 9 (Photo: Episcopal Public Policy Network / Facebook).

criticism of the new Administration, in which clergy had quoted the beatitudes.

"We got letters after that same Sunday for that same reading, who accused us of setting it up," recalled Curry with a laugh. "It's not our job to tell people what to do, but it is our job to lift up the values that in our baptism we say we believe."

## Intersectionality and Progressive Policy Prescriptions

Asked about food insecurity, Reumann read a question about how the churches were advocating to reduce work requirements as part of SNAP benefits (food stamps).

Episcopal Church Policy Advisor **Rashad Thomas**, a former staffer with the Democratic think tank Third Way, responded that the "big push" in COVID-related stimulus legislation was for a 15% increase in the maximum allowable SNAP benefit. Eaton added that potentially people on "both sides" of a congregation could support SNAP expansion because of an economic benefit to farmers. Rapidly increasing federal deficit spending was not addressed.

Eaton and Curry were also asked about racial justice.

"We see that there is a definite intersection between climate change and how it disproportionately effects communities of color and people who are poor. We try to work globally on these issues, especially when there is so much intersectionality amongst them," Eaton stated. "Everything has to be viewed through the lens of race."

Staff updates included advocacy for policies advanced by the political Left: expanded voting by mail, increases in SNAP benefits, and permanent legislative protection for those illegally brought into the United States as minors (known as "Dreamers"). Church officials also cited "inequalities" that they seek to "highlight and correct" including access to federal assistance for undocumented immigrants in the CARES Act.

"We often sign on to the same letters, the same issues. So we're the usual

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

# The Travail of Religious Medical Institutions

by Rick Plasterer



Maryland St. Joseph Medical Center  
(Photo: greshamsmith.com)

Charitable activity is part of religious duty, which has had enormous benefit to society. Yet today it is threatened by antidiscrimination law and policy. Behaviors that Christians commonly recognize as sinful become anti-discrimination categories when they are understood as part of personhood. The charitable religious practitioner, whether an individual or organization, is then in the position of discriminating against persons when objecting on grounds of conscience against facilitating sinful behavior.

This is the terrible reality for Catholic hospitals today. This past summer, defenders of liberty of conscience were riveted by a lawsuit against Maryland St. Joseph Medical Center. A woman sought removal of her healthy uterus in pursuit of her claimed identity as a man. The move was not unprecedented. Last year an appeals court in California ruled against another Catholic institution, Dignity Health, that declined to perform a hysterectomy on a woman claiming identity as a man.

In Roman Catholic Christianity, in particular, charitable activity ranks high in importance. But it must be offered in accordance with Catholic teaching. Religious social service is really an exercise of religion, and in times less polarized than our own, would be understood by most people as protected by the First Amendment. But it

must be conducted by religious standards; otherwise, it is not true to its mission, and is not distinctively religious.

The conflation of personhood with wishes and personal behavior, followed by a claim of discrimination if a religious party declines complicity in others' sexual choices, is enthusiastically reported by the mainstream media. And so it is with the current controversy over religious hospitals.

The media recounts stories of personal trauma and hardship if the religious party declines to be complicit in sinful behavior. *The Washington Post's* article detailing the St. Joseph Medical Center case is no exception.

We are told that the patient wishing to be served by the hospital, **Jesse Hammons** (a woman married to a woman, but identifying as a man) needed a hysterectomy to "feel more comfortable in his body."

Hammons is quoted as saying, "I felt like this hospital didn't see any worth in my life and the care that I needed." This is an example of the "affective revolution," and in particular the "affective rights thesis": what one feels establishes truth and thus justice.

Proceeding on the assumption that feeling establishes reality, the *Post* observes a "pattern of denying care to transgender patients." But of course this is not some new, disturbing trend. The

"pattern" has been caused by an inherently irrational concept, that a person of one sex can join the opposite sex if they say so. Catholic teaching against sterilization is not new; the hospital is simply acting in accordance with it. And without fidelity to religious teaching, a religious organization has no reason to exist.

There is no reason to think that a Catholic or other religious medical institution maintaining a standard of traditional sexual morality would deny care to a "transgender" identifying person (or a homosexual identifying person) in anything that does not violate its religious precepts. This was well argued by **Wesley Smith** in the July issue of *National Review*. Smith rightly pointed out that the hospital would not refuse to perform a hysterectomy on a cancerous uterus. But it would refuse to perform a hysterectomy for the purpose of sterilization, or a vasectomy to sterilize a man.

Faced with a final decision against them from the courts—and ultimately, as this conflict plays out, from the Supreme Court—some institutions may close. Others, however, may acquiesce. But it is doubtful that the ACLU or the LGBT leadership will be dissuaded in any case by the loss of access to medical care. Their passion is such that they prefer inferior access to care

*Continued on next page*

to “discrimination,” and of course, the Left would see an entirely secular medical system as desirable. It is the state’s responsibility to address all of life’s problems.

These demands for irreversible changes to the body raise another crucial issue—the priority given to a person’s desires at any given time. This might be called the “sovereignty of the present.” What one wants now absolves one of past responsibilities, and rules over future prospects. Too bad if one regrets one’s decision in the future.

Nevertheless, claims of personal pain, the Left’s trump card, may prevail. As the *Post* says, personal pain and anguish have been determined by medical authorities (in this case by a “transgender health” association) to make anatomy altering surgery “medically necessary.”

Use of terms that come from gender ideology make a delusion seem like justice denied by religious exemption. This includes such terms as “gender identity” (as if one’s real sex could be different from that of one’s body) and “sex assigned at birth” (as if sex were “assigned” by someone and

not something that objectively exists). And as is common in sexual orientation and gender identify (SOGI) cases, the plaintiff obtained the desired service elsewhere.

The *Post*’s article notes that St. Joseph’s Medical Center was acquired by the University of Maryland Medical System in 2012. It then received a “written agreement” that it could continue to provide services according to the medical guidelines of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Time will tell how much protection this gives the Catholic institution.

This leads to another consideration. Smith noted the threat that Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID) will be the next frontier in the war against religious freedom and human nature. This delusion involves the belief that one’s true self is one-armed, one-legged, or paralyzed. By the logic now used with respect to sexual anatomy, such a person should be able to demand amputation of a healthy limb (or really any other part of the body, such as the eyes).

Smith points out that BIID is now being normalized with the term “transabled.”

Predictably, what is being emphasized is that it is a “really, really strong desire.” Following the same logic as transgenderism, this establishes truth and justice.

It is reasonable to expect that in coming years many people will be aggrieved, sterilized, unable to have the normal sexual functioning they would like, their bodies altered to have the characteristics of the opposite sex. Or people will have arms or legs amputated, or be blind or deaf, because that is what they thought they wanted. It is a striking illustration of the consequences of human will against divine plan. But whatever happens in the future, the duty of both Christian individuals and organizations will not change. And that is, in all of life, to obey God rather than men. ✚



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## ‘Strictly Nonpartisan’ Lutheran and Episcopal Lobbies Still Firmly on the Political Left

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suspects,” Eaton said, acknowledging some lawmakers’ perceptions that officials with the two churches are understood to be predictably and uniformly on the political Left. “We’ve started to build broader coalitions. So we have us, but maybe the National Association of Evangelicals signing on and also interreligious colleagues. With that kind of a coalition, people can’t go ‘well, it’s the usual suspects: we’re used to the Mainline denominations, the Unitarians and the liberal religious sisters so that’s fine’ and we have had more success.”

### Christians in the Public Square

Curry maintained that the work of advocacy “is the practical working of love in the social and public context.”

The Episcopal Church official speculated it is probably not accidental that Jesus speaks of the spirit of God as “the

Advocate”—the one who advocates on behalf of God in John chapters 13–17 at the Last Supper.

“Jesus speaks of the work of the Spirit and the guidance of the Spirit leading the church in days when the church won’t know what it is doing—which actually is most days,” Curry recounted. “To advocate is to do the work of the spirit of God which is nothing less than the work of love.” And that “we gather in a time of multiple pandemics: one biological, one deeply sociological, both must be engaged with the spiritual.”

“It is a pandemic that has been occasioned and realized by any form of human supremacy over any other human child of God. It is a pandemic of racism.”

Eaton also addressed the role of the church in the public square.

“I have been charged with being political and not adhering to the principle of the separation of church and

state—that the church should really stick to spiritual matters and stay out of temporal ones,” Eaton said.

Quoting the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Eaton noted that the amendment keeps the government out of the church, but does not preclude the church from showing up in the public square.

“We understand that the church and state, the spiritual and the temporal, are both established by God and are both part of God’s twofold rule,” Eaton explained, stating that active participation in public life and emphasizing the duty of the government to care for its people have been a part of the Lutheran movement.

Eaton said that **Martin Luther** advocated for a “community chest” provided by local government.

“Engagement by the faithful in the public square is a way to live out our baptismal vocation,” Eaton proposed. “Advocacy is a deeply spiritual discipline.” ✚

# Critics Demand Young Life ‘Fully Affirm Queer Relationships’

by Jeffrey H. Walton

A prominent ecumenical Christian ministry is facing criticism from a group of former staff and volunteers who argue that it should open leadership roles to those in same-sex relationships.

Young Life, the Colorado Springs-based parachurch ministry, operates

school, and college. Further, special ministries seek to reach teen moms and teens with disabilities. Young Life counts “more than 80,000 staff and volunteers in 104 countries.”

The petition calls for intersectional justice, but demands regarding sexual identity and expression are the primary focal point. Organizers state that Young Life must “Normalize asking for and using correct pronouns” and “Fully affirm queer relationships and queer sexuality.”

Young Life describes its mission as introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith. However, “For many former Young Life employees, their break with the organization led to a break with their faith,” RNS

reports. It is a legitimate question to ask why former staff or volunteers who now disavow the Gospel want to continue in an organization whose primary purpose does not interest them.

Young Life is not the first Christian ministry to be pressured to open leadership roles to persons in same-sex relationships. InterVarsity and Cru have both been critiqued by former staff and volunteers who separated from the ministries after publicly identifying as gay or lesbian and pursuing noncelibate relationships, or affirming such unions.

In the past, small LGBT interest groups have had a public relations rollout and received coverage from RNS. Some fizzled without further coverage, others gained broader attention.

Officials in a handful of Christian institutions, including relief and development giant World Vision USA and Azusa Pacific University, made initial moves towards opening employment to those in same-sex partnerships, only to step back after donors objected.

The RNS article leads with the story of **Kent Thomas**, a former Young Life camp mountain guide. Thomas, a man in a gay relationship, was told by Young Life that he could not continue in his role. That haunts Thomas almost six years after, he tells RNS.

“I still have dreams about Young Life at least once a week,” said Thomas, now 30. “Sometimes I’m being welcomed as a queer person, sometimes I’m being ostracized as a queer person.”

As my colleague **Chelsen Vicari** observed with surprise, Thomas is not facing dreams about global pandemic, economic crisis, or bear attacks. Instead, weekly nightmares are about rejection from a student ministry years ago.

Young Life officials have sought to respond in a conciliatory tone, while maintaining orthodox Christian teaching.

“We are deeply saddened to know that any individual would walk away from their experience with Young Life feeling hurt or shamed,” read a Young Life

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Campers play in the pool at Washington Family Ranch Young Life camp in central Oregon (Photo: Liface / Wikimedia Commons)

campers and outreach to teens and young adults across more than 100 countries. Religion News Service (RNS) reports that the LGBT-affirming pressure campaign took shape in July as a grassroots “movement”—citing more than 6,700 signatures for a change.org petition asking Young Life to repeal its sexual conduct policy.

It is unclear how many of the signatories have a connection with Young Life, which counts approximately 348,000 youth “involved weekly around the world.” The organization has a broad reach to students in middle school, high



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## Why It Matters Jen Hatmaker Endorses Her Daughter's Homosexuality

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there's been little commentary, especially from female Christian leaders.

Where are the mature Christian mamas who've grappled with extending grace to their children while also affirming orthodox Christian teachings? Their experiences and insights are what we need to hear now.

I know they are out there somewhere. Those who indiscriminately affirm are easier to find with their massive and devoted online followings. Some female Christian leaders avoid the topic due to "cancel culture" fears.

Affirmation of sin isn't limited to homosexuality: we see it with premarital sex and cohabitation. Some Christian parents offer teenage daughters contraception and their sons barrier methods without discussion. They buy into a culture that says: "abstinence is unachievable, so it's better to be safe than sorry."

We cannot control our kids. We do not own them. I'm learning this lesson, even with toddlers. Our children are gifts given to us by God that come with a responsibility to demonstrate both God's grace and God's law. (Thank you to author Paul Tripp in *Parenting* for these insights.)

Parenthood is hard. We must show love without sacrificing truth. I'll be the first to raise my hand in exhaustion and discouragement in recognition of this.

Yet, Romans 6:23 warns, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." This truth is frightening. I can't bear to think of my children perishing and my being part of the reason they couldn't recognize sin. This verse should be enough to motivate us to boldly denounce sin while demonstrating unconditional love.

There's no Christian formula or 7-step article that holds the answers to this challenge. But with him all things are possible.

Actually, only with him is godly parenting possible. ✚

## Peaceful Protest

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people today lionize the "mostly peaceful" protesters tearing down statues, looting stores, and attacking the police.

I am proud of my friends from Sudan, South Sudan, East Turkestan, Nigeria, Egypt, and elsewhere. If *anyone* has justification for resorting to violence

because of the trauma they have endured, it is they.

But they don't. They express their cause with dignity and solemnity. They appreciate not just the freedom they have in this nation to protest peacefully, but all of the freedoms of living in America. ✚

## How Liberal Is American United Methodism?

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that the majority (but not all) of those conferences' delegates are liberal. But at the same sessions as their respective elections, the Louisiana Conference actually *voted against* a resolution to reject the Traditional Plan, while the Indiana Conference voted to essentially affirm the Traditional Plan's core values of continuing

our denomination's bans on same-sex union ceremonies and "self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergy.

We have much work ahead, but traditionalist United Methodist leaders have significant wells of grassroots sympathy in the U.S., as well as overseas, as we prepare for the future. ✚

## Critics Demand Young Life 'Fully Affirm Queer Relationships'

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statement provided to IRD. "These stories highlight the need to review how we train staff and volunteers to come alongside and love kids who identify as LGBTQ+."

The parachurch group notes it "welcomes and includes all young people as participants in our programs and activities, regardless of race, religion, ability, sexual orientation or identity, or other factors."

Young Life added that "stories now being shared by current and former members of the Young Life family represent a small fraction of the experiences across Young Life" but does not dismiss the claims. On July 17, Young Life created a council "to review all of these stories and recommend the appropriate course of action in each case."

The review council is to include both staff and non-staff.

"The formation of this council is a next step in what we expect will be a long process of review, reflection, repentance and reform," the statement reads.

The organization also notes that it "has expectations for leadership that are consistent with the tenets of our faith and what we believe is God's best for us. This includes an understanding that, at our foundation, we are all made in the image of a God who loves us. Young Life aligns with historical Christian theology in believing that sexuality is a gift from God and that God guides us in how to use this gift, including that intimate sexual activity should occur within a marriage covenant between a man and a woman." ✚

## IRD Diary:

# Peaceful Protests

by Faith J. H. McDonnell

The times, they are a changin'. They have already changed...a lot. The definition of a "peaceful protest" has changed. I guess that's not strange. The Bible tells us in the latter days lies will be called truth and truth called lies. People will call evil good and good evil.

When I first came to the Institute on Religion and Democracy I was exposed forever to the horrific persecution of religious believers globally—especially, and by largest margin, Christians. I became a protester. And I became quite adept at protesting, if I do say so myself.

It was difficult to convince most church members to protest. Maybe they had flashbacks to violent, Marxist-inspired protest demonstrations of the Sixties and Kent State. Our IRD protests were nothing like that. But most of what's happening today is.

Around 1999, **Nina Shea** and I mobilized Christian colleges to fight against genocide and slavery in Sudan. We thought that would be a no-brainer! Christians/college students seemed a winning protest combination.

Students loved hearing stories of daring from Baroness **Caroline Cox**. They promised to pray. But to our surprise, at least in *that* generation of college students, not many wanted to go the "no justice, no peace" route.

Nevertheless, whether it was three or four of us, or hundreds, we protested. I have participated in dozens and dozens of such protests.

At The White House's Lafayette Park, recently desecrated by "peaceful" protests of BLM/Antifa, we marched with signs and chants. We sent messages to Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump (always equal opportunity protesters) about Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, North Korea, Iraq, China, etc.

We also took to the Esplanade, the Constitution Avenue side of the White House. This was to protest the atrocities committed by **Joseph Kony's** Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels in northern Uganda. We walked in lines of hundreds, tied together at the wrists like Kony's abductees/child soldiers.

We urged the U.S. government to defend religious freedom using mainstream U.S. foreign policy by:

- Pressuring Sudan to stop genocidal jihad against and enslavement of black, African Christian Sudanese and give autonomy to South Sudan
- Providing Special Envoys for Sudan and North Korea (today, Nigeria)
- Protecting House Church Christians, Falun Gong members, and others in China
- Pushing Pakistan to reform its blasphemy laws
- Declaring Christians victims of genocide by ISIS
- And so much more

In other venues—such as the Sudan Embassy, the Canadian Embassy, the U.S. Capitol, the Iowa State Capitol, and the U.S. Capitol—we expressed solidarity with the victims of horrific religious persecution. We also demonstrated at the Chinese Embassy, the Iranian interest section, the Embassy of Nigeria, the Embassy of Saudi Arabia, and the Embassy of Afghanistan.

We marched, too—with Copts to *The Washington Post*, to protest both Obama and the media's collusion with Muslim Brotherhood Egyptian President Morsi. We marched in front of the offices of Squire Patton Boggs and the Coca Cola



Protesters peacefully march in front of the White House in 2011 asking for U.S. assistance on behalf of those in Abyei, South Sudan (Photo: Faith McDonnell/IRD)

Building, as well as at the Washington Monument and the Wallenberg Memorial at the U.N. Wherever we protested, and for whatever cause, one thing is true. *All* these rallies to protest horrific human rights violations on a massive scale, extreme religious persecution, unjust arrests and imprisonments, ongoing slavery, and genocide were *actually* peaceful. Not CNN "peaceful."

People whose immediate families—not ancestors—were starved to death, burned alive, beheaded, imprisoned, gang-raped, made actual slaves by racist Arabists, bombed, executed, and harvested for organs participated. Did these protesters ever burn a car, break a glass storefront window, loot a store, or beat someone on the street? No! They never broke a window. They never even broke a bottle.

The most violent actions we ever took were to shout "Down, down Bashir" at the Sudan Embassy or display enlarged photos of Coptic Christians murdered in the Maspero Massacre in Cairo before *The Washington Post*. While newspaper staff stood peering out of windows, we exclaimed "Shame!" These same news

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