
FAITH & FREEDOM

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Winter 1997-1998

Vol. 17, No. 3



Women at a retreat of the radical CAPACITAR group form a circle.

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From the Pews, IRD Diary, and Letters)*

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The IRD is a non-profit organization committed to reforming the Church's social and political witness and to building and strengthening democracy and religious liberty, at home and abroad. IRD committees work for reform in the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The IRD also sponsors the Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society.

Contributions to the work of the IRD are critically needed. Your gifts are tax deductible. Thank you for your support.

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In This Issue

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► **Your UM Action is stirring up** United Methodists. To get *Newscope* [an official UM agency newsletter] to devote a full page to the IRD "Reform Agenda" is a major accomplishment.

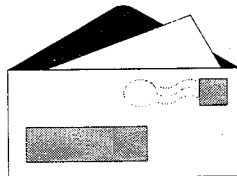
I thank the Lord for calling you to your special task and for your responding to him.

*M.O. Gustafson
Griffin, GA*

► **I quite agree with you – that** the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and most of the other mainline denominations have "lost their way."

"Religion" has to do with the relationship between Man and his God. This involves, to be sure, a perception of the *nature* of that God and of the relationships he prescribes among the

LETTERS



members of his creation. There can be no certainty with respect to these latter....

There is room for vast differences of opinion about the proper shaping of public policy, and no Church "leader" should be so presumptuous as to suggest that HIS conclusions are in some way authoritatively representative of the "will" of God. Those Church leaders who do so are, very literally, taking the name of the Lord in vain.

*Arthur F. Stocker
Charlottesville, VA*

► **In reading your recent good** issue [Spring 1997], I notice the item regarding environmental concern. Please understand that this is not just a game being played by some liberals.

Many of us who are orthodox, conservative, and traditional Christians are deeply concerned about the environment from a Christian perspective.

Christian environmentalism is based on nothing less than the doctrine of creation. As you know, this is affirmed at the beginning of the historic Christian creeds as also in the beginning of our Bibles. This doctrine is indeed the bedrock of historic Christian theology. Many parts of the Bible express God's concern for his creatures in one way or another, as for instance in Psalm 104.

It is true that some liberal conservationists have said and done silly things. It may also be pointed out that conservative opponents of the environment have also said and done some extremely foolish things.

*The Rev. H. Boone Porter
Southport, CT*

► **At a time when despair is an** ever-present temptation, this [Christian Women's] declaration is much more than welcome. C.S. Lewis described finding a friend as a "You too?" experience. That is the feeling I had when I read this declaration. As we all know, it is not good to be alone. Thank you.

*Roberta Green Ahmanson
Irvine, CA*

► **The [Christian Women's] dec-**laration shows that Christian women are free indeed: free to love, free to serve, free to be women wonderfully and marvelously made! To be the perfect complement of the man, exquisitely gifted to nurture, to educate, to lead unashamedly. Free in Christ and empowered like never before and forever!

*Magdalena Mejia
San Rafael, CA*

► **I thank you for your untiring** efforts on behalf of our churches. I look forward to each issue of *Faith & Freedom* not only to keep me informed, but also to find the encouragement I often need in staying with my Church.

*Marian Ebright
Versailles, MO*



FROM THE
PRESIDENT

An Inheritance of Blessings

In recent years, the IRD has looked at the question: What does it take to sustain democracy? It is clear that institutions of civil society – especially families, schools, and churches – are crucial. These institutions shape the character of democratic citizens and undergird democratic life.

This fall, we've seen this theory wonderfully illustrated in a pragmatic way. We've gained two new staff members who are products of splendid homes, churches, and schools. And IRD is much the richer for them.

Jerald Walz, our new Administrative Director, is the son of an evangelical United Methodist clergyman, Frederick Walz. The Walz family has been committed to biblical faith and to

church renewal. In fact, I worked with Jerald's mother, Prudence, on the Good News women's task force 20 years ago! Jerald is also a graduate of an outstanding Christian educational institution, Asbury College, in Wilmore, KY. (Full disclosure demands that I reveal that I'm a graduate of Asbury myself and have no small degree of pride in my alma mater.)

Stephanie Dickson, our new administrative assistant, received a solid education at an Episcopal high school and the University of the South at Sewanee. Stephanie, too, was reared in the church – and was influenced considerably by her grandfather, Bishop Alex Dickson, a leader in the renewal of the Episcopal Church.

(By the way, we are still proud of former IRD staff whom Jerald and Stephanie succeeded. This summer, Craig Smith joined the Family Research Council, another group that understands the importance of strong families to a democracy. David Sheaffer moved to the Philadelphia-based Christian relief and development organization, World Harvest Mission. Both carry on aspects of the IRD mission in other places of Christian service. And so the chain of blessing continues.)

Family also plays a wonderful role in the life of Janice Shaw Crouse, the director of IRD's Ecumenical Coalition on Women in Society. Janice's family boasts generations of capable and godly women that are an inspiration to our women's coalition. Janice's mother,

Ruth Shaw, 73, raised seven children and was an active partner in her husband's ministry in the United Methodist Church. Attending one class at a time, she completed college at age 62. After her husband's death, she finished seminary herself at 67 and was fully ordained in the United Methodist Church by age 68. She continues to preach and serve in churches, even after her formal retirement.

With such a heritage, it's no surprise that her daughter Janice, in addition to rearing two children, got her doctorate in communications theory, then was both a college professor and an academic administrator. She and her husband moved to Washington, where she became a speech writer for President

George Bush. Today, along with her work with the IRD, she heads Crouse Communications.

Janice's daughter, Charmaine Crouse Yoest, is pursuing a doctorate from the University of Virginia. The mother of three, Charmaine co-authored *Mother in the Middle: Searching for Peace in the Mommy Wars* and was on the staff of the Family Research Council. She debates our issues in editorials and media appearances. Charmaine spoke at two IRD-sponsored conferences in 1997.

Let me make one important point. This family includes confident and capable husbands and fathers as well as exemplary women.

These three women epitomize the godly women that IRD's coalition hopes to foster. What makes them extraordinary isn't just their accomplishments. They are worthy of emulation because of their dedication to Christ and their commitment to service—in the home, in the church, and in the world. What a contrast to the siren song of self-fulfillment offered by contemporary feminism!

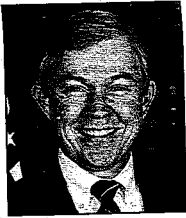
Men and women who exhibit such character and commitment are most often the products of stable families, faithful churches, and excellent schools. Without such social institutions, democracy cannot survive. Today, that's the urgent message of the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

IRD

by Diane Knippers



Four generations: grandmother Sarah Ruth Baird Shaw, mother Janice Shaw Crouse, daughter Charmaine Crouse Yoest, and granddaughter Hannah Yoest.



Interview

The Church and Politics

An Interview with Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama

Q Most people think of you as a man of the political arena, but you're also very involved in the life of the church. What does the United Methodist Church mean to you?

A The United Methodist Church has shaped my whole world view. I grew up in the church and went to a church college. Last year [1996] I represented the Alabama-West Florida Conference at United Methodism's General Conference. As a layman involved in politics, I have always been very interested in my church's approach to public policy issues.

Q Has the church been helpful to your thinking on these issues?

A My church and most of the mainline churches over the last 30 years have propounded a philosophy of politics and peace that I find frankly to be not very thoughtful or very helpful. At times it has embarrassed me. At times it has frustrated me and caused me to consider that I am contributing to my church and they are using that money to promote ideas that I don't think are wise. The politicization of the church is a real danger.

In my Lions Club at home I'm a conservative Republican. But there are Democrats and liberals and all kinds of people in that club. I wouldn't use the pulpit of my Lions Club to promote my personal agenda. So I certainly think the leadership in the church should not use the power of the pulpit to carry out a personal or a political agenda.

Q Is there a particular area of politicization that bothers you most?

A Over the years I have noticed that the Methodist Church and many churches have had a serious strain of pacifism in them, which I can respect, although I do not embrace it myself. Most Americans and most Christians are not strictly committed pacifists. But I admire persons of conviction who live and die sacrificially and in what they consider to be more perfect following of the Prince of Peace.

But we live in an imperfect world. People in our government are certainly imperfect! The Scriptures say that many are called and few are chosen, and those who take the more perfect way are in a minority. So we can assume

in a democracy we are going to have a nation that acts in its self-interest. Some may be prepared to live sacrificially and be prepared not to lift arms to defend their own lives. But what about the rest who may not be so committed?

As a representative of the state of Alabama, I am elected to serve all the people.

Q What is your own view?

A I tend to view the state as I think Jesus and Paul viewed it, which is as a secular enterprise. I don't think Jesus expected that Rome was going to be anything other than a secular state that defended its self-interests. But recall that he did not tell the Roman centurion to throw down his arms. He did not tell Zacchaeus to stop collecting taxes for Rome, even though part of those taxes would pay for Roman swords.

Paul said government is instituted among men to provide order, and there can be no progress in the world unless there is some sort of order. The state functions as a roof over our heads. It provides us with protection so we can maintain our freedom and live our lives in the way we think best and, most importantly for Christians, share our faith with others.

Q How do you find that church leaders respond to your convictions?

A There has been a consistent view among some in the national and world church leadership that those of us who were cold warriors and believed that the Soviet Empire was evil were ourselves quite evil. I thought that protecting our great American democracy was worth spending tremendous sums on the military. Unfortunately, our church publications criticized anybody who said we needed a strong defense. But had we not remained militarily strong, had we not adhered to the doctrine of peace through strength, then we wouldn't be where we are today.

I don't think it's fair to suggest that people who care about our nation's defenses don't care about peace. I'm pretty strongly committed to both peace and a strong defense. Of course, good people can disagree on how both are to be achieved. I respect someone who believes in pacifism. But then I expect that my church leadership ought to respect my beliefs.

IFD



reforming
the church

Church Leaders Miss the Moment

Church leaders who consider themselves “progressive” often claim a prophetic ability to “read the signs of the times.” They have mistakenly hailed all kinds of secular movements—Marxist, feminist, environmentalist—as the coming of God’s kingdom. At the same time, these leaders often miss the stirrings of God’s Spirit in their own ecclesiastical backyards.

We have seen two such unfortunate missed opportunities during this past fall.

One occurred on November 16, when over 60,000 churches around the country observed an International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (see p. 12). Many of these were “mainline” congregations. Yet national mainline agencies were standoffish or critical. The objection: it was taboo to join anything (even prayers) that had any perceived connection to the dreaded “Religious Right.”

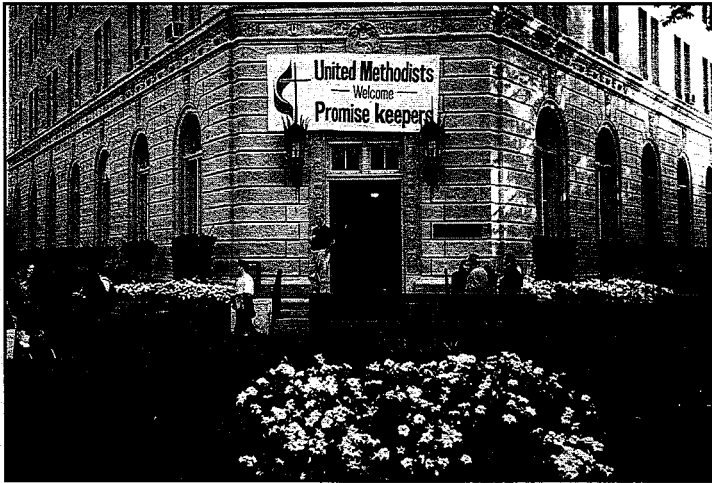
Similar thinking explained the other missed opportunity. On October 4 at least a half-million men gathered on the Mall in Washington for the “Sacred Assembly” of Promise Keepers. They prayed to repent of their shortcomings as husbands and fathers and neighbors, and to commit themselves to be more faithful.

Yet, to hear the fulminations of the feminist and religious Left, you would have thought that the Religious Right had been plotting a *coup d’etat* on October 4. Two press conferences were staged last summer at the United Methodist Building in Washington, DC, to give advance warning. Sponsoring the press conferences were the National Organization for Women (NOW), several homosexual rights groups, and assorted fixtures from the religio-political left: the Interfaith Alliance, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Catholic Call to Action, and Catholic Charities.

“The Promise Keepers speak about ‘taking back America’ for Christ ... when they really mean men taking charge,” warned NOW’s Patricia Ireland. She announced a campaign to “take the mask off” the “hidden”

political agenda of the Christian men’s movement.

The National Council of Churches raised the alarm with a video exposé of the Promise Keepers shown at its May 1997 Executive Board meeting. The exposé was produced by the Center for Democracy Studies, a project of the “left-liberal” *Nation* magazine. Alfred Ross, who heads the center, charged on the video that “our constitutional rights will be challenged on Saturday, October 4.”



For one day, the United Methodist Building was a place where Promise Keepers were welcome.

According to Ross, that awful day would represent a “dry run for a more ambitious holy war, and further national-scale assaults on the positions of women, gays and lesbians, the future of government action for social programs and the legal separation of church and state.”

When this video was shown at the NCC board meeting, only a few spoke up for Promise Keepers. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed

Church in America, told his fellow board members how his own initial suspicions had been dispelled when he saw men from his denomination energized by a Promise Keepers event. “My own church is now only 35 percent male,” Granberg-Michaelson noted. “I think we need to ask why Promise Keepers is effective in reaching men when our mainline denominations are not.”

Indeed, Promise Keepers have proven surprisingly popular among men in mainline churches. While some United Methodist officials were condemning the Christian men’s movement and lending their facilities to its critics, the largest Methodist church in the Washington area hosted over 300 visiting Promise Keepers.

One layman in that congregation, Lou Priebe, was determined that United Methodist men at the “Sacred Assembly” should receive a warm welcome at their denomination’s offices on Capitol Hill. So he obtained permission to use the Methodist Building as a hospitality center on October 4. “Promise Keepers is doing a tremendous job in influencing men back to a more positive role as adults, fathers, and husbands,” Priebe said. “They should be supported, not opposed.”

IRD

by Mark Tooley and Alan Wisdom

Church Arson Conspiracy Discounted

A report released by the National Church Arson Task Force has confirmed statistically that there never was any upsurge in racist, fiery attacks upon black churches, despite media stories to that effect in 1996. The task force found no evidence that black churches were suffering arson more frequently than white churches, no evidence that racism had motivated more than a small minority of arsonists, and no evidence of any widespread conspiracy. The report stated that only two or three out of 199 suspects so far arrested for church arson had ties to white supremacist groups.

But the two chief perpetrators of the 1996 media frenzy—the National Council of Churches and the Atlanta-based Center for Democratic Renewal (CDR)—still refuse to retreat from their original church arson theories. At an NCC-sponsored convocation in Washington last June, a defiant CDR spokesperson blasted the federal arson task force for having “sabotaged” the struggle for racial justice.

That NCC meeting and a subsequent NCC book entitled *Out of the Ashes* assumed a series of connections tying church arsons to organized white supremacists and then to mainstream conservatives. Jesse Jackson, featured as a speaker at the convocation and a contributor to the book, denounced conservatives for their stances on welfare reform and affirmative action. He mocked the racial reconciliation efforts of the evangelical Promise Keepers movement. “The right-wing church supported slave laws and segregation laws,” Jackson thundered, tarring conservative Christians as racist.

The NCC said it will work closely with Jackson as it moves into “Phase II” of its Burned Churches Project, going beyond church reconstruction to focus on eliminating the “root causes” of racism. Over \$11 million in total has been contributed to the project.

NCC Official Blesses Planned Parenthood Video

A new Planned Parenthood sex education video kit carries the endorsement of a National Council of Churches official. Although the “Talking about Sex” video kit defends abortion as “safe,” and claims that homosexual relationships can be “fulfilling,” the Rev. Joe Leonard—Associate Director for NCC Ministries in Christian Education—recommends the kit “unreservedly.”

The NCC comprises 33 denominations, nearly all of which in their official policies uphold traditional Christian standards that restrict sexual behavior to marriage between a man and woman. The NCC ostensibly has no position on abortion.

The 30-minute Planned Parenthood video for parents and children



CHURCH BRIEFS

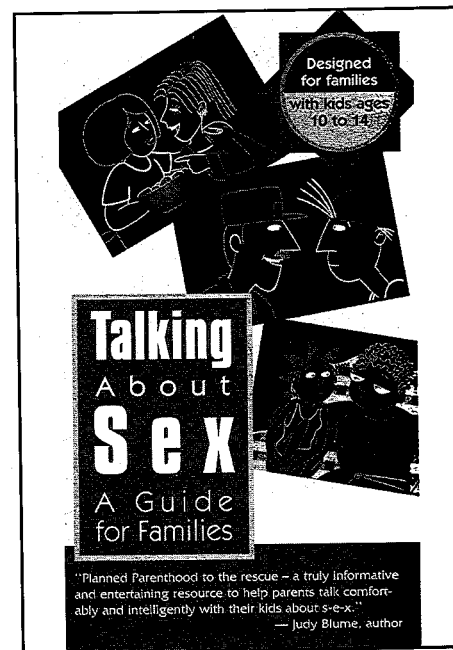
urges them to communicate about sexuality. But no moral code governing sexual conduct is presented—other than that sexual partners “be ready,” consent to the act, and do it privately. Different sexual orientations and the option of abortion are described without any moral judgment. The only act condemned is sexual abuse of children.

An accompanying parent’s guide is more explicit. While noting that “some religions condemn homosexuality,” the booklet affirms that “the bottom line is that homosexual love relationships can be as fulfilling as heterosexual love relationships.”

It asserts that gays and lesbians

can establish “lifelong, committed relationships just like heterosexual men and women.” They can also “form families” by adopting children.

The booklet describes abortion as “one of the safest operations available.” It asserts: “Most women report feeling relieved after an abortion.... Serious, long-term emotional problems



The cover of the Planned Parenthood video.

after abortion are rare. They are more likely after childbirth.”

“Hurray!” exclaims the NCC’s Leonard in the brochure for the Planned Parenthood video. Leonard praises the video kit’s information as “complete and accurate.” “More importantly,” he concludes, “this resource gives parents help in communicating their values about sexuality.”

Film Series Dismisses Faith

EcuFilm, a consortium involving the National Council of Churches and most oldline Protestant denominations, is distributing a video series on “Questions of Faith.” The series, aimed at Sunday school audiences, does pose many question, but offers few answers. It repeatedly rejects the

answers that are available in classic Christian teachings—upon which the ecumenical movement is supposed to be built.

The nearly 15 hours of video feature an all-star cast of today's most radical theologians: Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, New Age mystic Matthew Fox, aging leftist agitators Daniel Berrigan and William Sloane Coffin, radical feminists Rosemary Radford Ruether, Delores Williams, and Rita Nakashima Brock, and dozens of others. Only a handful of the speakers could be said to have a traditional Christian faith.

The five-part video series is full of all kinds of theological provocations. Pantheistic themes abound. Valerie Russell of the City Mission Society in Boston insists that we abandon the "old patriarchal images of God and re-conceptualize a variety of images of God." She suggests: "Nature images. Black. Women. Clouds in the sky. Do not limit God's power and passion. God is everything." Radical United Methodist pastor James Lawson argues that God is more an energy than a person.

Prayer, therefore, is seen as an act of self-actualization rather than communication with a transcendent Being. "Prayer is a time you meditate and get in touch with the seeds of power in you," according to Russell. John Vandersdall, president of the Lutheran seminary in Philadelphia, does not think it is appropriate to ask God to do things." He explains: "God is hands off. The God who is active in my life is a God I do not want. I appreciate God's distance."

"Is God in control?" asks Ignacio Casuera, a United Methodist pastor in Hollywood. "I hope not. God is one power among other powers. The past is far more powerful than God."

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman quips about miracles: "I think on a good day God has power to do this stuff, but God has a lot of off days."

God's power in inspiring the Bible is similarly minimized. "No one be-

lieves the Bible literally," asserts author Will Campbell. Bishop Spong says, "I want us to take the tradition seriously, but be willing to walk away from it in wonderful new directions."

Without confidence in the witness of the Scriptures, most of the speakers can give no firm answers as to what happens after death. They notably refrain from pointing to Jesus as the path to eternal life. Former Catholic priest James Carroll gives his view: "We're all on this escalator going up.... Well, I don't know what's at the top."

A Cold War Grudge

A coalition of leftist religious groups, having formerly championed Marxist guerrilla movements of Latin America in the 1980s, has revived in pursuit of a more negative objective: shutting down the U.S. Army's "School of the Americas." It was at that academy in Fort Benning, Georgia, that Latin military officers were trained who turned the tide against the Marxist movements in countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru.

But activists led by Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois prefer to call the facility "the School of Assassins." They point to a few graduates such as former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega and the late Salvadoran right-wing leader Roberto d'Aubuisson as typical products of the school who brutalized their countrymen. Demonstrators against the school have trespassed at Fort Benning, videotapes vilifying the school are being circulated nationwide, and legislation to close the school has been pushed repeatedly by Rep. Joseph Kennedy (D-MA).

The coalition behind these bitter denunciations includes groups such as the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, the Network in Solidarity with the People of

Guatemala, and the Nicaragua Network, which once functioned as U.S.-based support funnels for Marxist guerrilla forces during the 1980's. These old fronts are now cooperating again with the Washington lobby offices of the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the



United Methodist Carol Richardson and Catholic priest Roy Bourgeois lead a 600-person march on Fort Benning, in protest against the School of the Americas.

United Church of Christ, the Franciscan Mission Service, and the U.S. Jesuit Conference in support of Rep. Kennedy's legislation.

The School of the Americas has trained 60,000 Latin military officers. Its defenders, such as U.S. Army Chief of Staff Dennis Reimer, say that it has helped form more professional armed forces to serve under the new democratic, civilian governments throughout Latin America. No opponent of the school has established any direct link between specific human rights abuses in Latin America and specific training at Fort Benning. The critics acknowledge that the school teaches the importance of human rights. But they insist that Latin American officers merely sneer at these instructions. **IRD**

'Healing and Empowering Ourselves'

Where Radical Feminism Goes Astray

Girl Talk" is an appealing title for a workshop targeting girls age 10-13. It is one of five "faith labs" offered by the Re-Imagining Community at different churches in the Minneapolis area. The other labs include "Dollmaking," where participants can "create our own traditions from out of the stuff of our feminist dreaming."

The California-based CAPACITAR Network urges women to "claim your life" and "heal and empower" oneself. Members become the "mothers in labor to birth the politics of the new millennium."

One year ago, *Faith & Freedom* reported that radical feminists were still "re-imagining God." Now they are more firmly entrenched than ever in oldline church structures. Church Women United recently announced that it would honor five women theologians as "sacred storytellers" and "prophetic voices" in 1998. Of those five, four had been speakers at the first (1993) Re-Imagining Conference.

Almost all the official oldline women's organizations are linked to Church Women United—organizationally, financially, and programmatically. Through these and other channels, the radical feminists are working to instill their theology at the grassroots level. Reshaping the mind of "the girl child" is a prime objective.

The "re-imagined" theology clashes with orthodox Christianity across a wide range of basic teachings. In our earlier article, Jennifer Caterini analyzed two dangerous tendencies of radical feminist thought: embracing other faiths and abandonment of the responsible use of our God-endowed reason. This article focuses on three additional points at which the radical theology leads women far astray from Christian faith.

Rejection of Transcendent Monotheism and God the Father

The abandonment of orthodox Christian theology ultimately is the rejection of the transcendent God in favor of

glorifying self. Solely on the grounds of the male image involved, the radical feminists reject God as a loving father. This rejection paves the way for them to embrace a female deity of their own creation. We find this theological progression in the book *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*, by Starhawk, a self-described witch who has found a warm reception in some Christian circles.

Starhawk describes the "religion of the Goddess" as "not a religion with a dogma, a doctrine, or a sacred book; it is a religion of experience, of ritual, of practices that change consciousness and awaken power-from-within."

Much of the radical feminist ideology focuses on the "magical, mysterious" powers of women to "create the sacred space" that brings "regeneration, wisdom and healing." In *Mysteries of the Dark Moon: The Healing Power of the Dark Goddess*, Demetra George exalts "the dark side" of women's "emotional-sexual cycle." She identifies this side with the new moon and the "fiery, assertive, menstruating" female who is "objectionable and threatening to men."

Hand in hand with the glorification of experiences unique to women is the view of women as victims of a culture centered around a sovereign, holy Father God. George denounces the "patriarchal culture" for "obliterating women's memories of the magic of their moon times."

Starhawk declares that "the blame for women's destruction must fall...on the religious and economic systems... that encourage men to act them out by victimizing women."

It is a very short step to a new religious system in which women become the object of worship. "The name of Jehovah is feminine and it means, 'I am woman, I am life,'" according to Laurie Cabot in *Power of the Witch*. From there some feminists move on to a perverted sexual desiring of women by other women. Starhawk teaches, "Power-from-within is the power of the low, the dark . . . and our



This sculpture of women of various cultures was created by Corlita Bonnarens, RSM, in honor of the UN Conference on Women in Beijing. The CAPACITAR newsletter describes the figures: "As women through the ages, they sit around a central fire, sharing, nourishing themselves and each other. Together, they give light and hope, nourishing the world around them."

passionate desire for each other's living flesh."

Throughout the history of the Church, God has used many means to reveal His greatness and bring us closer to Him. The difficulty with the radical feminist focus is that it turns away from and rejects the transcendent God, our Father, to concentrate on the very human "Woman" and "Her" human experiences, in an attempt to transform them into that which is transcendent and "Holy." In short, to create a deity in their own image. But from Mt. Sinai, we hear the echo of the thunderous command: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Rejection of Jesus Christ as Divine Savior and Lord

There is nothing more troubling in radical feminist theology than the displacement of Christ from the center of Christian faith. A "Eucharistic Ritual in Memory of Her," published in *Wellsprings: A Journal for United Methodist Clergywomen* (Fall 1994), shows how this insidious deconstruction is accomplished. On the surface the ritual uses much of the traditional communion liturgy. But honor is diverted from Christ to those biblical women who are the "foremothers of Christ." And instead of Christ's body and blood and suffering on the cross, the ritual substitutes women's bodies, their blood and their pain during childbirth as the sacrifice necessary for healing and empowerment.

In the invitation to the communion table, the community is called to "give new birth to the broken body of Christ"—a slight, but very significant, twist of meaning. Women, who give birth, are portrayed as healing Christ rather than coming to Christ in brokenness to be healed by Him. In publishing the ritual, the editors claim that Sojourner Truth, Hagar, Joy Harjo, St. Hildegard and others have, through the Eucharist, "birthed new creations" and "hallowed all bodies in order to heal the bodies that have been broken."

Denying the Ingrained Sinfulness of Humans, and a Naive Attraction to Utopian Schemes

A common theme of radical feminist ideology is healing that comes from within a woman. There is no need for re-

pentance or atonement when all a woman's problems stem from her oppression and victimization by men. Nor is there a need for Christ when she can heal herself.

Underlying the workshops and worship therapies is the assumption that women can redeem themselves through their own inward, mystical powers. This kind of romantic view of human nature has always been the flawed cornerstone upon which utopian projects have been founded—and around which they have fallen.

An attempt to institutionalize the radical feminist agenda is evident in the 1997 report of the President's Interagency Council on Women, following up on commitments made at the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. The report is utopian in its assumptions, ultra-liberal in its sole reliance on governmental solutions to human problems, and radical in its embrace of quotas and abortion as favored solutions.

The introduction to the report sets forth some very noble-sounding goals: "economic opportunity and security for women and their families," "quality education and health care throughout the life cycle," "full participation

of women at all levels of political and economic life," "reproductive rights and equality in sexual relations," and so forth. But in context it becomes clear that all these social benefits are supposed to be guaranteed by the federal government.

Thus "economic security" may mean welfare as an unconditional entitlement. "Full participation of women" means state-enforced quotas. And "reproductive rights" means abortion-on-demand, subsidized by the taxpayers.

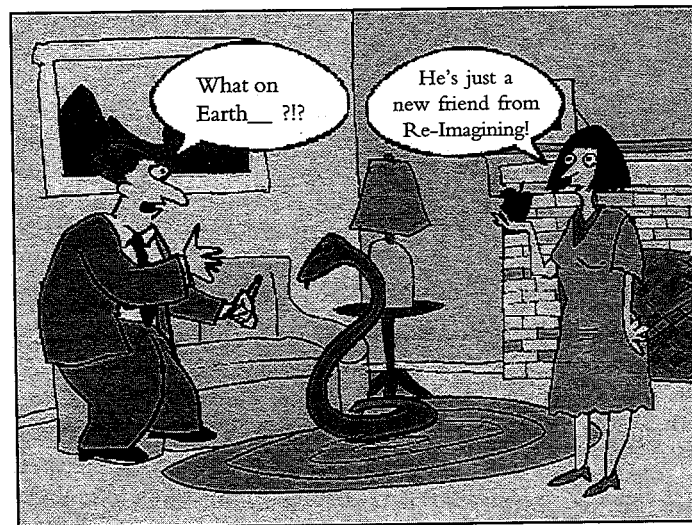
There is no sense of the danger that such concentrated government power might become abusive.

This report illustrates how the radical feminists are daily gaining ground in key government agencies. But perhaps even worse, the radicals are becoming more deeply embedded in the hierarchies of our churches. Sometimes the religious influence is blatantly unorthodox, and at other times so subtle that it is difficult to recognize.

The false religion propagated under the feminist guise betrays the Church, threatens the Christian faith of countless persons, and damages the larger society. The Institute on Religion and Democracy is committed to countering that influence through its project, the Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society.

IRD

by Janice Shaw Crouse



Making the Arguments against 'Gay Marriage' in Civil Society

'Let Marriage Be Held in Honor'

The New Testament writer to the Hebrews enjoined his readers: "Let marriage be held in honor among all." This injunction sums up what is at stake in the debate over "same-sex marriage" in civil society.

A state that recognizes "same-sex marriage" is attempting to redefine marriage. In a previous issue of *Faith & Freedom* (Spring 1997), we contended that this redefinition would amount to a debasement of marriage. It would reduce the strong bonds of marriage down to some vaguely-stated "commitment" between any two sexual partners.

Yet it remains a challenge for Christians to articulate why we all must stand firm for the honor of marriage. The logic of "same-sex marriage" can seem irresistible to many in our individualistic, utilitarian society. We must comprehend the misleading appeals, and then offer a better answer.

Here is an outline of the arguments most often deployed by "gay marriage" proponents:

✧ Every person seeks and needs intense experiences combining self-fulfillment and connection to other persons. Sexual intercourse is such an experience, and therefore sexual satisfaction is a kind of "human right." All partners who pursue this great good are equally entitled to the status of marriage.

✧ Sexual relationships are a personal choice. Individuals should be left free to seek their sexual happiness as they deem best. Neither the state nor the church should favor any one relationship over another.

✧ Marriage is "just a piece of paper." It was defined by law to suit past social convenience, and it can be redefined by law to suit today's social convenience.

✧ The bodies of the sex partners do not matter. What matters are their feelings of love for one another. It is "sex discrimination" to insist that the bodies of the partners

must be male and female.

✧ Marriage has no necessary connection to childbearing. Some couples choose to have children, some couples choose not to, and some couples are incapable of having children – it makes no difference.

✧ Both state and church should accommodate themselves to current social realities. Since many people have sex outside of traditional marriage, we should make room for those relationships in our legal code and church teaching.

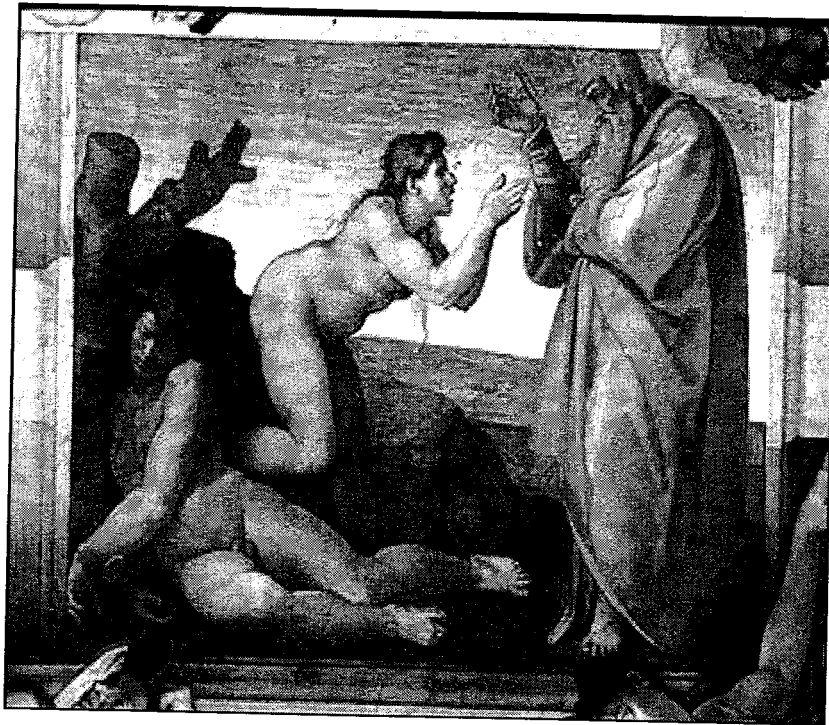
✧ Lastly, there is the challenge posed by Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) on the floor of Congress: What harm would it do to their heterosexual neighbors if he and his partner Herb were granted a marriage license? The assumption is that no harm is done.

We must respond to these arguments by

returning to basic questions: What is marriage? And why does it deserve society's special favor? The Church and our Western democratic tradition have developed some good responses:

✧ **Marriage is not a "human right."** There is no universal entitlement to socially-approved sex. Sexual intercourse is not required for individual happiness, social adjustment, or spiritual maturity. Christianity has a long tradition of respect for celibate men and women who, by the grace of God, deny their own desires and offer a special service to God and the community.

✧ **Marriage is not merely a personal choice.** It is an institution, among others, established by God for the benefit of humankind. Marriage is the building block of human society. It is through the faithful love and self-control demonstrated in a lifelong marriage that adults and children learn the virtues required of responsible citizens. Therefore society does have a special interest in encouraging healthy marriages.



Michelangelo's "The Creation of Eve," from the Sistine Chapel, points us back to the origin of marriage in creation.

☒ **Marriage is not defined by the state.** Nor is it defined by the church. It is defined instead by God's purpose in the creation, when he formed man and woman as partners. Marriage is a divinely-ordained pattern of life intended as a blessing for all peoples. Human societies around the world and throughout history have recognized the pattern of marriage (in some form). No society so far has ever treated homosexual relationships as the moral or legal equivalent of marriage.

☒ **As an institution, marriage has its rules.** Among these rules are: that it should unite a man and a woman (the two complementary sexes), that it should be freely and deliberately chosen, that it should be exclusive and monogamous, and that it should be a total and permanent commitment. Marriage is not an infinitely flexible contract that can be extended to any two persons.

☒ **Marriage has many intertwined functions.** It constitutes a physical and spiritual union of two disparate persons – the highest human analogy to the relationship between Christ and his Church. It provides a lifelong guarantee of emotional and economic support. It offers a responsible channel for the satisfaction of sexual desires. It supplies the best setting in which children may be born and nurtured. It brings people together into families. These various functions of marriage are not separable; they come together in a package. **And no other human relationship offers the complete package of marriage.** Consequently, no other human relationship should be treated as the equivalent of marriage.

☒ **The bodies of the partners do make a difference in marriage.** Marriage is far more than just an intense emotional experience of love. It is the mystery of how "the two become one flesh."

That mystery necessarily involves the leap across the great divide between the two sexes, male and female, which God created for each other.

☒ **Marriage is related, normally and naturally, to childbearing.** The most vital interest that society has in marriage is its concern for the healthy upbringing of the next generation of citizens. Sociological studies have shown conclusively that a child fares best under the care of

a father and mother who are married to one another. Our current social scene demonstrates the damages that result when childbearing is commonly separated from marriage. Therefore the state has powerful reasons to recognize and subsidize marriage which do not apply to other sexual relationships.

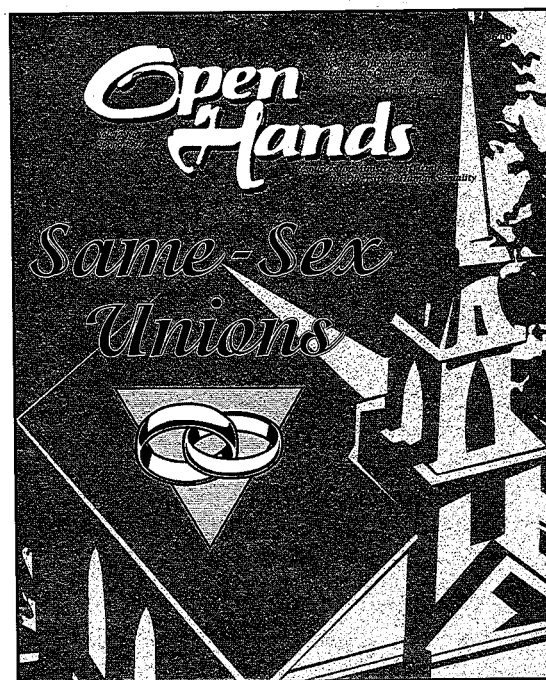
☒ The fact that some marriages are childless does not eliminate the distinction between these marriages and other relationships. The state should not make any predictions as to whether a man and woman applying for marriage will eventually bear or adopt children. **As far as the state is concerned, each married couple is ready to rear children – and to receive the support of the state in doing so.**

☒ The fact that many persons do not conform to the ideal of marriage does not imply that the ideal is dispensable. Most Americans – whatever their religious faith, whatever their personal behavior – appreciate the value of the institution of marriage. **Polls consistently show 65 to 80 percent of Americans opposed to re-defining marriage to include homosexual relationships.** It is quite legitimate to base public policy upon this moral consensus.

☒ On the other hand, it would be deeply destructive if a handful of judges were to overrule all the democratic processes that have produced our present marriage laws – and substitute instead their own peculiar late 20th century notions about the equality of all sexual relationships. If this new doctrine were imposed judicially, suddenly the state would turn hostile to the moral convictions of most of its citizens. Sooner or later, **the full force of the law would be deployed to compel "bigoted" Christian individuals and institutions to comply with the official**

policy of "non-discrimination" against extra-marital sex. The threat to religious freedom would be severe.

☒ Finally, there is an answer to Barney Frank's question. It is wrong to assume that a marriage affects only the two spouses. In fact, it affects the whole community. Every couple strengthens or weakens the institution of marriage by the example that it sets for the neighbors. **We must take great care about the relationships that we hold in honor.** **IRD**



The cover of a magazine published jointly by gay-affirming groups in the United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Church of Christ, and American Baptist Churches. The issue is full of arguments and models for church blessings of same-sex unions. The original is in shocking pink.

by Alan F.H. Wisdom



Prayer for the Persecuted

RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM

A Day to Change Lives

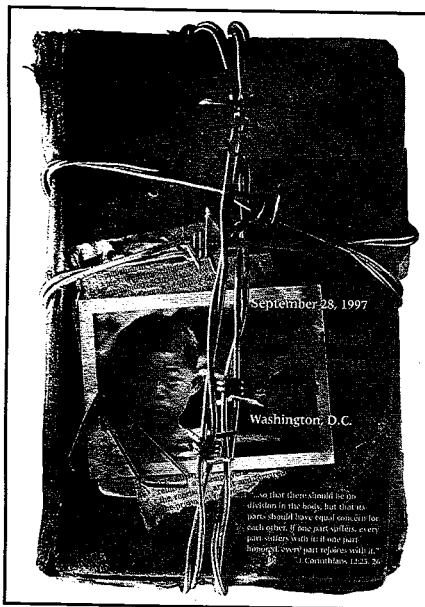
With the theme "Shatter the Silence," the second annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church broke in upon tens of thousands of churches and penetrated the hearts of millions of individuals across the United States. U.S. Day of Prayer Coordinator Steve Haas reported that over 60,000 churches had responded to the call to pray on November 16, 1997.

The Institute on Religion and Democracy was a sponsor of this significant time of supplication. IRD staff contributed to the Day of Prayer resource kit, which was instrumental in awakening many to the widespread suffering for the sake of Christ.

The 1997 International Day of Prayer season opened on Sunday, September 28, a day of prayer observed by Christians in over 110 countries. A poignant "National Service for the Persecuted Church" was celebrated at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington. The service featured a beautiful song of faith, written by a young Chinese Christian woman whose hymns are sung throughout her homeland. Christians from China, Pakistan, and Sudan recounted the sufferings of their people, and tearfully expressed their great joy that their Western brothers and sisters were beginning to shatter the silence surrounding the persecuted Church.

November 16, the culmination of the U.S. Day of Prayer observances, saw a truly ecumenical concert of prayer in over 85 denominations and 14 parachurch groups. Protestant, Catholic, Coptic, and Jewish congregations committed to pray. The National Association of Evangelicals promoted the event to all its associated churches. And mainline Protestant congregations across the country were well-represented among the 60,000 working to "shatter the silence."

This show of Christian solidarity by local mainline churches was particularly impressive, given the lack of encouragement from their top national leaders. The official magazine of the United Methodist Board of



The cover of the program for the September 28 service at National Presbyterian Church.

Church and Society carried a diatribe against the Day of Prayer by a former board staffer. Robert McClean labeled the campaign for the persecuted church as a "stealth attack" by conservative Christians upon the mainline churches. "The unfortunate truth is ... every congregation that joins with this group and observes the November 16 'International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church' weakens the struggle to help those persecuted for their faith," McClean warned.

"This is deceptive," complained Albert Pennybacker, Associate General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, about the Day of Prayer. "There is a political agenda hidden under the prayer day. We

don't think prayers are for that." Pennybacker insisted, "I wouldn't say persecution is raging around the world."

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly approved the concept of intercession for the persecuted. But, at the suggestion of national agency staff, the Assembly declined to endorse the November 16 date and instead set a separate date (January 4, 1998) for Presbyterians to pray. Staffer Susan Ryan explained to the commissioners: "We did this so as not to link ourselves to an image of a Christian America that goes overseas with an imperialistic bent."

Nevertheless, many Presbyterian and United Methodist and Episcopal congregations did participate in the ecumenical event. In fact, the President of the United States heard the message of concern for the persecuted in a mainline church. On November 16, while traveling in California, President Clinton decided to drop in on the service at Malibu Presbyterian Church. What he witnessed was a previously scheduled special Day of Prayer observance.

United Methodist renewal groups Good News, RENEW, and the Mission Society for United Methodists worked hard to shatter the silence, ordering resource kits and using their publications to promote the event. The IRD sent resource kits to thirty Episcopal bishops. We received Day of Prayer reports from 27 Episcopal parishes. One described the observance as "a holy moment and a moving time of prayer."

In 1998, the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church will be celebrated on November 15 in the United States and around the world. This is a day that changes lives – the lives of persecuted Christians, and the lives of those who pray for them.

by Faith J.H. McDonnell



United against Persecution

Becoming a victim of religious persecution today is a depressingly ecumenical and widespread fate. Men, women and children are imprisoned, harassed, tortured and executed for their faith around the world.

If there is a small silver lining in this forbidding cloud, it may be that millions have been moved to action in response and that groups which previously traveled in different circles have begun to see potent opportunities to cooperate. Politicians, government officials and even journalists have been stunned by the emergence of a human rights issue backed by widespread and politically powerful constituencies.

The lightning rod for surprised reactions has been the Wolf-Specter "Freedom From Religious Persecution" bill, and one of the themes seems to be that there is something wrong with Christians in this country focusing on victims of religious persecution — that unless they are helping everybody, they have no business trying to help anybody.

People laboring in the human rights vineyard know that this argument is both wrong and self-defeating. The human rights movement has always benefited from the efforts of people who were moved to action — at least initially — because they identified with particular victims. Twenty-one years ago I was a sophomore at a little Methodist college in Michigan. I was a preacher's kid, but I wasn't thinking about the persecution of Christians or any other human rights issue, for that matter.

Then one day I read about Christians being killed and tortured in Brazil. I wasn't doing anything about it, but Amnesty International and others were. That was a personal epiphany, and it started me on a journey which led, eventually, to directing Amnesty's Washington office.

It seems obvious to me that someone who has been touched by the suffering of one victim is forever more sensitive to the suffering of all victims. Do I hope that the communities now galvanized on religious persecution will

stay engaged and fight for other victims with equal fervor? You bet. Do I think their current efforts deserve to be mocked or denigrated? No way.

It also seems that some critics of the bill simply suffered from cognitive dissonance when they saw the Christian Coalition and Amnesty International sitting together on the same panel testifying at the House International Relations Committee hearing and both arguing that more

needs to be done to combat religious persecution. They shouldn't. Human rights belong to everyone, and so does the struggle to protect them.

The Wolf-Specter bill and its supporters are focusing attention on vital human rights problems on which human rights groups have been fighting losing battles for years. One year ago, for example, some in Congress, along with human rights and refugee groups, were fighting to stop draconian new political asylum procedures. We failed.

Wolf-Specter would help change that for those seeking asylum on religious grounds, and that may alert Americans to the broader problem all asylum seekers face. Likewise, it tackles the problem of inadequate export controls on U.S. manufactured equipment, such as electric shock weapons, that can be used for torture.

We don't think the Wolf-Specter bill is perfect. There are several areas where we would like to see the bill strengthened or modified. But none of them have prevented Amnesty International and other groups from praising this important opportunity to draw attention to a serious problem and do more to help the victims.

Naysayers argue that human rights cooperation between politically liberal and conservative communities won't last, and they may be right. But if the history of the human rights movement is any guide, the cynics will end up as surprised by the staying power of the cooperation as they have been by its emergence.

IRD

by Stephen Rickard

Director, Washington Office, Amnesty International



At a demonstration for China's human rights last October, the crowd included American and Chinese Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, Central Asian Muslims, Taiwanese, union members, Hollywood actors, and Democratic and Republican members of Congress.

Church Leaders' Ad Ignores Cuba Persecution

On January 21—the day of the Pope's arrival in Cuba—an advertisement signed by over 100 religious figures appeared in major U.S. newspapers. The ad was entitled "A Call for Healing and Dialogue Between the People of the United States and the People of Cuba."

Specifically, it requested the U.S. government to "restore direct flights from the United States to Cuba" and "lift the restrictions on the sale of food, medicines, and medical supplies to Cuba."

The ad said not a word about violations of religious freedom and other civil liberties under Fidel Castro's communist regime. Its concern was directed exclusively toward economic hardships in Cuba, which it linked to the U.S. embargo. The ad requested no changes in Cuban government policies.

At the same time, the human rights group Freedom House stated that "the Castro regime continues its severe repression of religion and harassment of religious believers." The evangelical news service Compass Direct reported that, shortly before the Pope's arrival, "an unidentified number of house churches were ordered to close by agents of Cuba's National Registry of Associations."

IRD President Diane Knippers sent an open letter of protest to the signers of the U.S. newspaper ad. "It is incomprehensible to me that a group of American religious leaders could make a public statement on the occasion of the Pope's visit to Cuba and neglect to express their solidarity with the persecuted Church," Knippers wrote. "John Paul II will certainly not make that mistake while he is on Cuban soil."

Endorsers of the ad included: Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary

of the National Council of Churches; Frank Griswold, the new Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church; Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A); and the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.

Official Chinese Church Body Defends Government

As concerns rose within the United States about the persecution of Chinese Christians, the state-sanctioned China Christian Council launched a public defense of government policies. "There is no general persecution in China," council president Han Wenzao told foreign reporters in Beijing last July. "But China, being so vast, you cannot expect the



INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

policy of religious freedom to be applied equally everywhere."

In August the retired head of the China Christian Council, Bishop K.H. Ting, wrote an open letter to Joan Brown Campbell of the U.S. National Council of Churches. Ting objected to a U.S. State Department report documenting the persecution of Christians. The bishop complained that the report revealed "a USA with a self-image as the police or ruling nation of the world." He warned that "any U.S. government intervention as 'Protector of Religion'" would jeopardize the "relationship of dialogue and consultation with the government bodies" that the council enjoyed.

In one of the most notable cases of Chinese religious repression in 1997, the council sided with the government and against an imprisoned Protestant evangelist. Peter Xu Yongze, leader of the million-member "Born Again" house church movement, was arrested last March. In September he was sentenced to ten years in labor camp, for "disrupting public order."

"The detaining of Xu is definitely not persecution of Christians by the Chinese government, but a normal handling of a criminal prosecution," Han Wenzao told the Chinese government news agency Xinhua in June. "All that Xu Yongze has done goes against true Bible teaching and Christian doctrine," Han alleged. "Basically, he is not a Christian."

WCC Discourages Pressure Against Iraq

A World Council of Churches delegation returning from Iraq spoke out against both the current UN economic sanctions as well as a possible U.S. military strike against Iraq.

The WCC delegation declared that any military action against Iraq "would only intensify the sufferings of the powerless Iraqi people caught up in the middle of this conflict."

In its January 30 statement from Geneva, the delegation also concluded that sanctions against Iraq "seriously violate the human rights of large sectors of the Iraqi population by denying them the right to adequate food, clothing, housing, medical care, social services and employment."

The WCC delegation did not suggest any alternative means of forcing the Saddam Hussein regime to comply with UN efforts to halt the proliferation of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons.

IRD



FROM THE PEWS

A Strange Notion of Tolerance

One Saturday last July, Westminster Presbyterian Church in southwest DC hosted an all-day seminar led by the Rev. Harry B. Stock, a former Episcopal priest now affiliated with the pro-homosexual Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

"Learn the truth!" proclaimed a flyer advertising the seminar. "... For far too long, heterosexual teachings from the Bible have dehumanized gays and lesbians.... Such teachings strip them of their pride as God's chosen people!" I was curious as to how Mr. Stock would find a rationale for this view. So I decided to attend the seminar, and to offer an opposing opinion where appropriate.

At the opening of the seminar, Mr. Stock solicited comments from the participants and told us to feel free to interrupt him with questions. Then his presentation quickly took on a controversial tone. He asserted that although the Bible "contains the Word of God," one has to "remove the garbage" in order to uncover the truth. For example, he suggested that the sin of Sodom was "inhospitality" rather than homosexual practice. There were five or six of the 23 participants who found these views to be not in accord with traditional Christian theology, and a spirited but respectful discussion ensued.

Apparently, this open discussion was not acceptable to the Revs. Ruth and Brian Hamilton, the pastors of Westminster Presbyterian Church. Ruth Hamilton interrupted to announce that "these people [the gays and lesbians present] were invited with the assurance this was a safe environment, and not to be condemned.... Such actions will not be tolerated." This announcement was mystifying, since no individual was at any time said to be condemned. Obviously, suggesting that the Bible did not condone homosexual practice amounted to personal condemnation in the eyes of the Hamiltons.

At the lunch break, Ms. Hamilton engaged in a contentious discussion with a person opposed to Mr. Stock's point of view, and Mr. Hamilton asked him to leave, along with others in his group. Ms. Hamilton then approached me and questioned my motives in attending the

seminar. When I told her I came to understand the alternate point of view and discuss the issues, she said: "It doesn't sound like you came here to learn. These people came to be affirmed in their lifestyle – not condemned."

I pointed out to her that nothing in the seminar materials had suggested that non-affirming positions would be unwelcome. To this she replied, "Next time I will include such language." Shortly thereafter, two Washington policewomen arrived, presumably to remove by force those not heeding the call to leave. As I had already told the Hamiltons that I intended to leave after lunch, I simply accelerated my departure.

The outrageous manner in which the pastors of Westminster Presbyterian Church conducted the seminar shows that they have no respect for the constitution of their own denomination, which stipulates that sexual relations are to be reserved for the marriage of a man and a woman. Nor did they feel compelled to conduct themselves with the decorum expected of persons of their profession.

I find it ironic that, in the name of tolerance, these two ministers of Jesus Christ evidently called in the police to exclude respectful dissenters. I find it strange that their

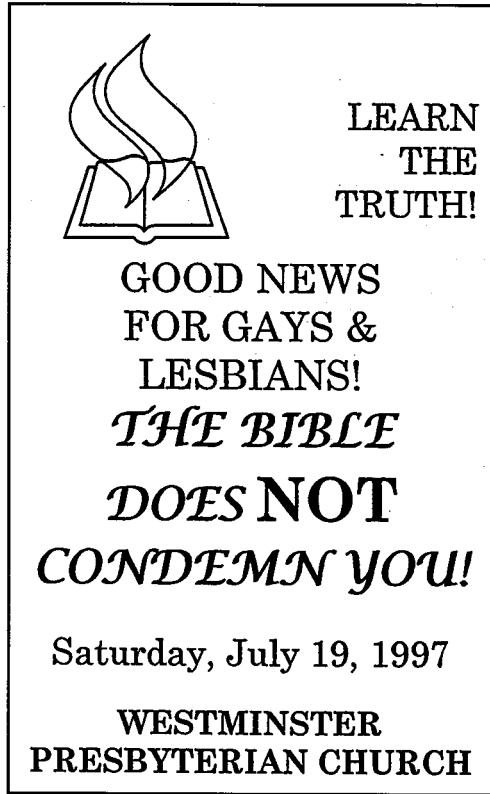
tolerance extended to all points of view except that which is the official teaching of their denomination. And I find it sad that, while affirming the dignity of homosexual persons (as do I), they actually treated their gay friends as children – presuming that they could function only in a "safe environment" protected from the kind of vigorous debate that we hold to be beneficial for all other persons.

I raised this matter with the elders of Westminster Church and with the National Capital Presbytery, but neither took any action. The chairman of the presbytery committee defended the Hamiltons' right to hold the gay-affirming seminar.

IRD

by Allan D. Dobras

Dobras attends Immanuel Bible Church in Springfield, VA.



The cover of the brochure for Stock's seminar.



IRD DIARY

An Eye-Opening Experience

In the summer of 1997, the IRD had two excellent interns assisting our work, Alicia Bowman from the University of North Carolina and Daniel Hoover from Furman University. We asked them to offer reflections.

Alicia writes:

“My understanding of the corruption within the main-line denominations was rather limited before my arrival at the IRD. Daily exposure has certainly informed me of the self-gratifying beliefs which have replaced many of the traditional, biblical pillars of the church.

“This disheartening stripping of my ignorance intensified when I attended the Episcopal General Convention for a day. I sat in on the debate over whether the church should bless same-sex unions. Questions concerning absolute truth and righteousness flooded my mind. Why was this argument even an issue with a church which supposedly adhered to the truth of God’s Word?

“In reading the Bible, however, I was reminded that diversion from the truth within the church is no new obstacle. Watching the staff here at the IRD contend earnestly for the faith out of love for God and for the believers within the church has helped to counter the discouragement evoked by the reality of the elements within the church which are creating a movement that does not consider biblical commands to be relevant.”

Daniel writes:

“While attending the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I watched worldviews clash as members committed to a biblical worldview tried to debate members guided by more contemporary ideas. The

Social Justice and Witness Committee provided an ideal environment to test which argumentative appeals hold the most sway within the PCUSA today.

“As committee members began to arrive, a visible tension filled the room. In the past, abortion has been a very divisive issue. Today would be no different.

“Supporters of Overture 97-21 [to have the denomination give moral counsel against partial-birth abortion] built an argument by appealing primarily to authority. Several advocates cited former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop. A petition signed by Presbyterian doctors, which asked the church to support the overture, was presented to the committee.

“The testimony of the opposition relied on emo-

tional personal stories. One young lady explained how she became pregnant while in Central America. After much prayer and meditation, she decided to have an abortion. Unfortunately, in Central America there was not a safe place to have the procedure. As a result, she was forced to wait until her third trimester to have the abortion in the United States. By ignoring opposing arguments the young lady neither established common ground nor demonstrated fairness.

“Surprisingly, the committee seemed captivated by her personal story. [It rejected the overture, which was later passed in amended form by the full Assembly.]

“The PCUSA committee structure does not make decisions based on what can be proven to be true. Instead, the committee structure rewards the group that is able to present the most impassioned argument.”



Delegates at last July’s Episcopal General Convention heard testimony that was both impassioned and factual from this Sudanese Episcopalian and other speakers at a rally for the persecuted church sponsored by the IRD.

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