

FAITH & FREEDOM

REFORMING THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL WITNESS

Summer-Fall 2000
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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

MAINLINE CHURCH LEADERS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, *page 16*

CANDIDATES AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, *page 18*

SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT HATE CRIME LEGISLATION, *page 20*

CHURCH-BACKED GROUP IN CHINA: A COMPROMISED SITUATION, *page 12*

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN RUSSIA, *page 14*

REPORTS FROM THE CHURCH CONVENTIONS

METHODISTS MOVE TO CENTER, *page 6*

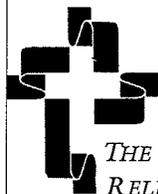
PCUSA LIMPS ALONG, *page 8*

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND JUBILEE, *page 10*

*Plus From the President,
Church News, From the Pews,
International Briefs, IRD
Diary, and Letters.*

Standing Fairly Firm: Delegates to the United Methodist Church's 2000 General Conference, hands joined in song, refused to be intimidated by the disruptions of pro-homosexual protesters.

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THE INSTITUTE ON
RELIGION & DEMOCRACY1110 Vermont Avenue NW,
Suite 1180
Washington, DC 20005

Phone: 202-969-8430

Fax: 202-969-8429

Email: mail@ird-renew.org

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.

Diane L. Knippers
President

Alan F. H. Wisdom
Vice President and Editor

Mark D. Tooley
Research Associate

Steve R. Rempe
*Research Assistant and
Associate Editor*

Faith J.H. McDonnell
Religious Liberty Associate

Luther D. Herche
Research Assistant

IRD Staff
Abigail G. Noll, Jerald H. Walz

Newsletter Design
Anne Green

LETTERS

I RECENTLY RECEIVED THE SPRING 2000 EDITION OF *FAITH AND FREEDOM*, AND HAVE read it completely through, as I usually do. The publication is highly thought provoking.

I am one who has, no doubt, become sickened by the debate and often-publicized scandalous actions of the clergy and bishops with regards to the issue of same sex unions. However, I believe that as important as the same sex-union issue may seem, it merely serves as a diversion from our dealing with a much greater issue, which presently gets little coverage from anyone, including your organization.

I am referring to the UMC's failure to take a strong and unequivocal stance on the issue of abortion. I urge you to lessen your coverage of the issue of same-sex marriage, and begin to provide meaningful information on how we as Christians, regardless of denomination, can make a unified difference in this national sin.

Jerry Starnes
Carterville, IL

YOUR NEW FORMAT FOR *FAITH AND FREEDOM* IS INDEED first-rate. If possible, please send me four more issues.

The truly great apostasy of the church seems to me not only with the liberal bishops and clergy, but also in the "silence of the lambs"—Episcopalians who simply will not recognize and confront the issues head-on. But then, you and IRD know this sadness far better than I.

When all is said and done, there has always been the Remnant, and only a Remnant. Perhaps now the definitions and distinctions are sharper.

John A. Marion
Colonial Heights, VA

THANKS SO MUCH FOR SENDING ME YOUR BRIEFINGS. MY WIFE & I ENJOY YOUR mailings. I can understand the problems that you see in our church. I've been contending with them for years now—in quite a few parishes. Fortunately, the Rio Grande (NM) Diocese has a good Bishop. I shudder to think of the drift if he wasn't there to steer a course. I always wondered how the diocese in New Jersey could operate under a John Spong. Was there a mass exodus?

Don and Margie Adams

Rio Rancho, NM

During Bishop Spong's 21 years presiding over the Diocese of Newark (1979-2000), membership in the diocese declined by 41 percent. ED.

NEW ADDRESS

In August, IRD moved our offices from 16th Street to our new location on Vermont Avenue. Please note the new address, phone, and fax numbers in the masthead on this page. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Brief letters from a variety of viewpoints will be published in upcoming editions of *Faith and Freedom*. Letters may be edited for space constraints.

PHOTO CREDITS

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

TAKE TIME TO NOTICE GOOD NEWS

By Diane L. Knippers

While clicking through the TV channels in my hotel room recently, I was dismayed by two HBO programs. The first, a "documentary" on strippers, I quickly clicked past. The second, an insipid game show called "Strip Poker," I watched to the end. (I was curious to see how far they would go. They went far enough to tantalize a thirteen-year-old boy.)

One evening of television and I was ready to announce the end of civilization. In the midst of negative cultural trends, it's easy to miss some heartening news.

The story of the mainline churches and their human sexuality debates is an important example of a larger, hopeful picture being obscured by smaller, discouraging events. One might conclude from news reports – often focused on high-profile cases of clergy defying historic Christian teaching – that the move to accept non-marital sexual behavior is an unstoppable liberal juggernaut rolling over our churches. It is not.

Here's the good news: In a 12-month period, four major mainline Protestant denominations said "no" to the forces of moral relativism. In August 1999, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reaffirmed that ordained ministers are expected to abstain from homosexual relations. In May 2000, the United Methodist Church reaffirmed that UM clergy are prohibited from performing same-sex marriages. In June, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted to clarify its ban on same-sex unions. And in July, the Episcopal Church, which does show serious slippage on this issue, still rejected proposals to develop liturgies for same-sex unions.

Are these actions simply the last gasp of conservatives before these denominations follow Unitarians and Reformed Jews in conferring their blessings upon extra-marital relationships? I don't think so. My optimism comes, in part, because there is more good news on the broader cultural front – the burgeoning marriage movement. To the degree that these denominations learn to appreciate the value of marriage again, they will be much less susceptible to all the counterfeits and inadequate substitutes for marriage.

The breadth of this new movement is outlined in "The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles" (www.marriagemovement.org). It includes organizations such as Mike McManus's Marriage Savers

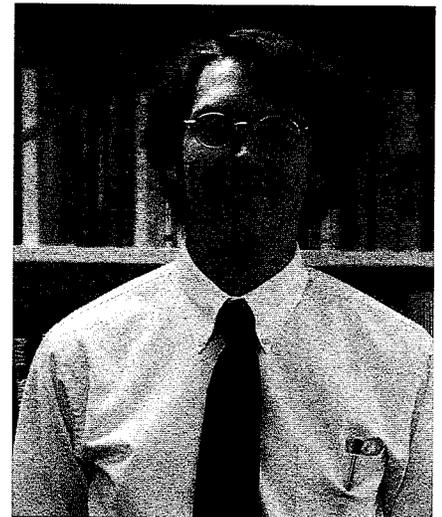
(www.marriagesavers.org); the Religion, Culture, and Family project at the University of Chicago Divinity School (www.uchicago.edu/divinity/family); the annual Smart Marriages conference (www.smartmarriages.com); the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University (www.marriage.rutgers.edu); and the Alliance for Marriage (www.allianceformarriage.org).

Most of our church leaders are baby boomers, and too many of them are still fighting the perceived battles of 30 years ago. They are still trying to ensure that women aren't trapped in rigid, restrictive roles such as "housewife." But that isn't the big threat in contemporary American society. Rigid sex roles have been replaced by a vast, uncharted relational terrain—a wilderness of individualism and pleasure-seeking that has our children "looking for love in all the wrong places." Even secular scholars are now prepared to assert that a good life normally includes a strong, healthy marriage and family. Churches, too, must rediscover the wisdom of scriptural teachings on sexuality and marriage – out of fidelity to their heritage, but also out of their commitment to be "relevant" to social needs.

* * * *

The IRD board of directors, meeting in early October, agreed to set the defense of marriage and family as a major IRD priority for the coming year. Our new mission statement reads, "Perhaps the most serious threat to American democracy comes from the fragmentation of the family, the building block of society." Our goal is to help our churches find "ways to strengthen the vital institution of marriage."

This fall, the IRD is saying farewell to one staff member and welcoming another. Abigail Noll, who pitched in on tasks ranging from bookkeeping to reporting on Episcopal Church matters, is moving to Alabama. Luther (Luke) Herche will come aboard to assist Mark Tooley with United Methodist Action. Luke is the son of a UM pastor from Maryland. 



Luke Herche

CHURCH NEWS

CHURCH COUNCIL SEEKS
EVANGELICAL AND
CATHOLIC PARTNERS

Reset by budget deficits and political controversy, the nation's largest ecumenical agency says it wants to reorganize under a new umbrella that would include Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. The National Council of Churches (NCC) now includes 35 denominations, most of them mainline Protestant. Almost 50 million Americans belong to NCC denominations.

The proposed expansion seems to stem from the NCC's financial troubles. Over 80 percent of the council's income comes from its relief arm, Church World Service (CWS), which retains a popular following and provides a tangible service. The remainder of the NCC, largely devoted to political action and publications, suffered deficits for several years in a row and depleted its cash reserves.

The NCC has often relied on CWS to cover its deficits, but supporters of the relief agency have become increasingly vocal in protesting this practice. At its May Executive Board meeting, the NCC agreed to grant the relief agency more fiscal autonomy, although it still falls under the council's final authority. Meanwhile, the NCC is still trying to collect donations from member churches to erase its 1999 deficit.

A "vision team" of eight persons will explore the NCC's options for broadening its base and will report to its annual assembly in November. NCC General Secretary Robert Edgar has optimistically asserted that "it is time to reignite the ecumenical movement." But signs of further trouble abound.

In September NCC officials raised the alarm about another severe cash crunch. They had to beg the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to expedite a \$400,000 contribution, despite the fact that the council had not met one of the conditions for the money to be released. NCC projections indicate that the council's spending will have to be slashed by 38 percent in the first half of 2001 to make its budget balance.

Meanwhile, National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) president Kevin Mannoia rejected the idea of a merger with the NCC. Mannoia told the *Presbyterian Layman* that Evangelicals would be glad to discuss common concerns with the NCC, but "we have no interest in engaging in a dialogue if there is the assumption of a new organization that transcends the NAE." He also stated, "They [the NCC] just need to know that we are not going to compromise in what we believe."

STILL ANTI-NUCLEAR
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

Two new religious coalitions have emerged this summer to demand the abolition of all nuclear weapons and oppose any anti-missile defense for the U.S.

The "Joint Nuclear Reduction/Disarmament" initiative, based at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., denounces "long-term reliance on nuclear weapons" as "morally untenable and militarily unjustifiable" and calls for the "universal outlawing" of all nuclear weapons. Signers of the initiative include top officials of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Greek Orthodox archdiocese, the National Council of Churches, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church, and the U.S. Catholic Conference.

Another initiative, from the Interfaith Committee on Nuclear Disarmament, opposes any U.S. defense against nuclear weapons. According to the Interfaith Committee, missile defense would ignite a "new arms race," drain money away from "life affirming programs" such as "social services and environmental protection," and "threaten security among nations" by distracting them from diplomacy.

"While it [missile defense] may give those of us privileged enough to live in the U.S. a so-called security blanket, it would strike fear into the hearts of the rest of the world's inhabitants," warned an official from the Church of the Brethren. "A nation with missile defense has no accountability. It may strike without fear

of retaliation, attack on a whim."

Other endorsing bodies include the Episcopal Church, the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, and several Roman Catholic orders.

RELIGIOUS COALITION
PUSHES 'SAFE SEX' ON
BLACK CHURCHES

In July the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) convened in Washington, DC, its fourth annual National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality. Featured speakers included former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders.

Founded in 1973 in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*, RCRC has long claimed to represent a "pro-choice" consensus among mainline churches. Its members include agencies of the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ. In recent years, RCRC has expanded to include homosexual advocacy.

Under its current president, the Rev. Carlton Veazey, a black Baptist pastor from Washington, DC, RCRC has targeted black churches with a campaign for liberalized standards of sexual behavior. Included in this initiative is "Keeping It Real," a program to counteract abstinence-only programs among teenagers with a purportedly more plausible emphasis on "choice," "options," and "safe-sex."

Over 600 church activists and academics hearkened to Elders' message. Focusing on the threat of AIDS, she complained: "We wait until they're in trouble and then we run out and try to fix it. That's too late. We've got to make sure contraceptive services are available to those who need it."

Elders conceded that it would be good for children to abstain from sex, but argued that it was unrealistic to expect them to do so. "We say, 'Condoms will break,' and condoms *will* break, but I can assure you, the vows of abstinence break far more easily than any condom,"



Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice President Carlton Veazey aims to erode conservative views on sexuality in African-American churches.

Elders proclaimed to wild applause from the audience.

Acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality was a strong theme running throughout the three-day summit. "The way one is genetically wired is determinant of what kind of sexual orientation they may have.... The church has a responsibility to embrace and bring into the fold all people of all sexual orientations," insisted RCRC president Veazey.

PRESBYTERIANS DEBATE, 'WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT JESUS?'

A controversial presentation at a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) conference in July has provoked a lively "Jesus debate" within the denomination. At the Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference in Orange, CA, featured speaker Dirk Ficca condemned traditional Christian evangelism as "a kind of ethnic cleansing." Ficca, a Presbyterian minister who is executive director of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, preferred an approach that would "allow one to retain the integrity of one's own Christian faith and, yet, not have to convert someone of another religion."

Ficca drew an analogy in which the world was compared to "a holy place ringed with windows." The windows

represent the various religions, which are "a vehicle by which truth comes into the world." The analogy suggested that, ultimately, it was the same truth that shone through all religions.

Ficca posed a rhetorical question: "Well, if God is at work in our lives whether we're Christian or not, what's the big deal about Jesus?" His answer was that "Jesus reveals how God has been at work in all times in all places throughout history in all people to bring about salvation." The Presbyterian speaker explicitly rejected the classic Christian view that "through one person [Jesus] at a certain point in history, who lived and died in a certain way, only through this person does God's salvation come into the world."

A report on these remarks in the official Presbyterian News Service set off a fierce exchange on the Internet. In October the General Assembly Executive Council released a statement affirming "Paul's proclamation that 'in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself.'" But the council also defended "Dr. Ficca's right to his own views" and "the propriety of the ... decision to invite Dr. Ficca to be one of the speakers at this particular conference."

STUDY COMMENDS EVANGELICAL PARENTING

A new study by Princeton University has found that conservative Protestant parents yell at their children less frequently than do other parents, and are more likely to praise or show other forms of affection towards them.

"For almost a decade, a number of scholars have claimed that conservative Protestant parenting is abusive and authoritarian," said Brad Wilcox, a senior research fellow at Princeton's Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. "Our findings call into question those assertions and suggest that conservative Protestant parents have a neo-traditional style of parenting that is perfectly fine."

While previous studies had shown that evangelical parents are more likely to spank their children, Wilcox found

that these parents are also more likely to praise their children. This second element creates a distinctive evangelical method of parenting, according to the Princeton researcher. "There is a lot of affirmative parenting going on, and less yelling, and it suggests that this is not an abusive parenting style, and some of the accusations made against this subculture are, quite frankly, inaccurate," said Wilcox.

THE 'SIMBA CIRCLE'

In an attempt to "promote education, cultural clarification, and spiritual development," the Evangelical Lutheran Church Division for Church in Society has developed a program aimed at young black males named the Simba Circle.

The Simba Circle claims to blend the seven principles of Kwanzaa with the Gospel and African culture to promote self-discovery amongst black teenagers. Kwanzaa is an African-American holiday created by Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga in 1966 as an alternative to the observance of Christmas. Karenga disparaged the celebration of Christ's birth as "the practice of the dominant society."

"Our curriculum covers everything from conflict resolution and anger management to goal setting and life planning," said Venus Williams, a member of the planning committee for the camp. "African and African-American history, health and nutrition, safety, and male, female, peer, and family relationships are also key areas covered in the curriculum." Notably absent from the list is any study of Christ or the Scriptures.

At the two-week program, the "Simbas"—Swahili for "young lions"—are divided into "tribes" by age. Counselors—referred to as "Nation Builders"—are assigned to each tribe to guide and share personal experiences.

"We try to help these young men to unravel the message of what it takes to be a real man," said Dr. Lewis Dodley, who heads the outdoors program at the camp. "The role play we do at the camp dispels some of the myths that a man is not supposed to cry.... Men can and do cry." **F**

UNITED METHODIST GENERAL CONFERENCE

UNITED METHODISTS MOVE TO THE CENTER

By Mark Tooley

It is America's third largest religious denomination, and one that for decades has been renowned – or notorious – for its reflexive liberalism on everything from politics to theology. Its most famous congregation in recent years has been Foundry United Methodist Church, where Bill and Hillary Clinton are faithful attendees, and where the pastor champions “gay” and abortion rights.

But the 8.4-million-member United Methodist Church may be moving back to the center, and perhaps even slightly towards conservatism. Delegates at the church's quadrennial General Conference decisively defeated any effort to accept homosexual practice or same-sex unions, condemned partial-birth abortion, abandoned a pacifist stance in favor of just-war theory, supported voluntary school prayer, and elected several conservatives to the denomination's highest church court.

The delegates even voted to join with evangelicals and Catholics to pray for persecuted Christians around the world, despite warnings from some church liberals that the “Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church” was a “religious right” ploy. Delegates also voted to seek observer status with the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Fellowship, both of which were once dismissed or ignored by mainline Protestants.

Delegates at the General Conference, which convened May 2–May 12 in Cleveland, were signaling that a century of unquestioned liberal domination in mainline Protestant churches was ending. “We who are liberals shouldn't pretend we're in the majority,” Bishop Roy Sano of Los Angeles acknowledged last year. “We're in the minority. We're no longer mainline.



Methodist bishops Susan Morrison (second from left) and Joseph Sprague (right) are arrested by Cleveland police after disrupting the General Conference.

We're sideline. Evangelicals are in the majority.”

THE DEMOGRAPHY IS TELLING

Demographically, liberal piety is not faring well. The United Methodist Church, like most mainline denominations, has been losing membership for 35 years. But the fastest rate of decline has been in the church's most liberal precincts, like Bishop Sano's southern California region. United Methodism on the West Coast and in the Northeast is imploding. In the South and lower Midwest, it is holding steady. Overseas, it is growing.

In recognition of these trends, the General Conference voted to reapportion delegates for its next meeting in 2004, subtracting numbers from the West and Northeast, and adding new delegates from the South and overseas. In four years, for the first time, the southern and overseas churches will have a clear majority of delegates.

This means that the sexual liberalizers will likely fail by even greater margins next time, with their western and northeastern supporters facing ever-dwindling representation. The pro-homosexual advocates within the church, accustomed to growing acceptance within the secular culture, now must confront the realization that victory within United Methodism may no longer be inevitable, or even possible.

Every United Methodist General Conference since 1972 has voted to retain marriage as the denomination's standard for sexual behavior. But the margins of the votes sometimes seemed to narrow over the years. And pro-homosexual scored a coup four years ago by persuading 15 bishops to embrace their cause publicly.

Over the last four years, a number of pro-homosexual clergy have conducted same-sex unions in defiance of church law, hoping to create a *fait accompli* for the 2000 General Conference. Either the church would have to accept same-sex unions or face a schism, they had supposed. “After this General Conference, someone will be leaving the denomination,” promised the Rev. Greg Dell, who was suspended from the pastorate for a year after conducting a same-sex ceremony at his Chicago church.

SOLID MAJORITIES
UPHOLD THE STANDARDS

In fact, the votes in Cleveland were not even close. Solid two-thirds majorities rejected any effort to water down United Methodism's marriage-centered sexual morality. They did so in the face of multiple

pressures. "Soulforce," an ecumenical pro-homosexual lobby, arrived in town to back up the United Methodist liberals with civil disobedience. Soulforce's leader, the Rev. Mel White, a former Jerry Falwell aide who came out of the closet, instructed his followers in tactics for disrupting the Methodist conference.

White and almost two hundred others, including United Methodist Bishop Joseph Sprague of Chicago, were arrested outside the convention center by polite police officers. The next day, during the votes, several dozen demonstrators occupied the convention floor in protest against their impending defeat. Delegates voted to allow them to stay if they were not disruptive. But after delegates reaffirmed the church prohibition against same-sex ceremonies, the demonstrators desperately began singing "We Shall Overcome." Cleveland police ushered them away. This time, two bishops were arrested, while another fifteen bishops were singing in solidarity.

"You've made it clear that I don't belong in this church," shouted one angry delegate after losing a vote. He ripped up his speech in front of a microphone on the convention stage. "We are being disenfranchised," complained another delegate from the church's Western Jurisdiction, which strongly backed the homosexual cause. The vote to reduce the West's future representation at general conferences, and the conference's refusal to elect a westerner to the church's Judicial Council—a sort of ecclesiastical Supreme Court—were additional rebukes to the church's most liberal region.

Although the liberal bishops were outspoken, moderate bishops were reticent about their personal views on sexuality. The exception was Bishop Arthur Kulah of the Ivory Coast who lifted up the biblical view of marriage in a sermon to the General Conference. In later remarks to a black clergy association, Kulah explained that as a child he had two mothers in his polygamous culture. Then the missionaries came, he recalled, teaching from the Bible that marriage is between one man and one woman. And now some want to say that marriage can be one man with one man, or one woman with one woman, he observed. The African church will not accept that kind of revisionism, Kulah insisted.

Church liberals, who like to represent themselves as spokespersons for the oppressed Third World, seemed unable to explain why their most forceful opponents on sexuality were Africans, Asians and Latin Americans.

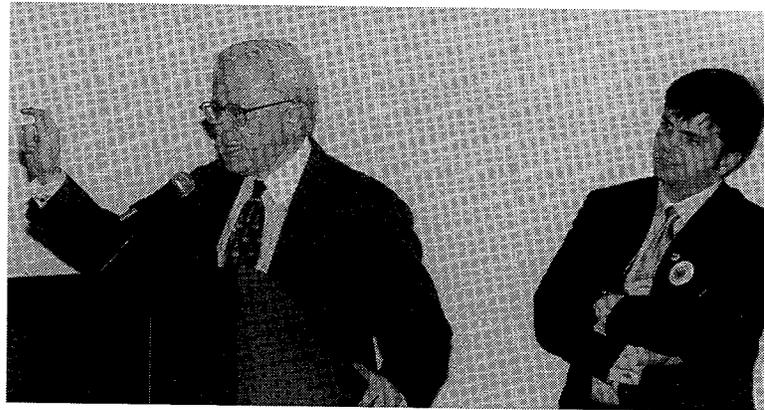
A BROAD, BUT INCOMPLETE, SHIFT

The Methodist left also seemed unprepared for the decisive 70-percent vote against partial-birth abortion. It was the first word that the United Methodist Church had spoken against a specific abortion procedure since the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973. The denomination had helped found the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights 25 years ago. Just four years ago, United Methodist officials supported President Clinton's veto of legislation that would have banned the partial-birth procedure.

Just as surprising was the easy election of conservatives to fill three of five vacancies on the Judicial Council. So too was the election of the president of an independent evangelical seminary to the University Senate, which oversees the church's official seminaries, and which is traditionally the preserve of liberal academics.

United Methodists were not yet willing to give up on the nearly comatose National and World Councils of Churches. But they did vote to seek observer status in the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Fellowship, a move that few could have predicted only a few years ago. Liberal mainline Protestants no longer occupy the center of America's religious discourse, most delegates seemed to acknowledge by their votes.

Liberals still won some victories. Capital punishment was denounced. Without discussion, resolutions were passed that condemned the U.S. Navy presence in Puerto Rico, demanded an end to U.S. trade sanctions against Iraq and Cuba, called for a "Jubilee" global debt cancellation, and urged closure of the U.S. Army's training school for Latin American military officers. Conservatives saved their strength for the battles over sex, church polity, and theology. Perhaps most important to them was a resolution that easily passed declaring that Jesus Christ is the Lord and the Savior of the world. This statement implicitly ruled out syncretistic



Michael Horowitz (left) exhorts UM delegates to stand up for persecuted Christians worldwide. UMAAction director Mark Tooley listens at the UMAAction-sponsored luncheon.

theologies that declare all religions to be equally true.

Conservative advances arose, in part, from better organization by evangelical caucus groups at this General Conference. But there was more at work. Even moderates are starting to realize that 20th-century theological liberalism has largely failed the church, just as radical secular ideologies have failed societies. The United Methodist Church's decisive reaffirmation of traditional sexual morality, along with its moves to the center-right on several other issues, signals a significant redirection not only for mainline Protestants, but perhaps for American culture at large. f

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Limp Along, Sometimes in the Right Direction

By Alan F.H. Wisdom

"How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings 18:21)

So spoke the prophet Elijah to the people of Israel, as he stood opposite the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. It was a stern message: You must decide which god you will worship, whose commands you will strive to obey. Those who try to avoid the necessary choices condemn themselves to limping through life, unable to reach any destination.

The 212th General Assembly (2000) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) preferred a more comforting thought. "We choose rather to see the [theological] differences [among Presbyterians] positively," the Assembly declared at the close of its meeting in Long Beach, CA. The 558 Presbyterian commissioners expressed their confidence that differences over central Christian doctrines "in fact have the potential to make our unity in Christ even stronger."

These cheery phrases came in response to an overture that had asked the Assembly to declare an "irreconcilable impasse" in the denomination. That overture, from Beaver-Butler Presbytery in western Pennsylvania, noted the contradictory theologies that were driving different segments of the church. It pointed to disagreements over matters such as biblical authority, salvation in Christ alone, and absolute moral standards as not amenable to a split-the-difference compromise.

The commissioners were glad to take any easy escape from such dilemmas. In one of their most closely

watched decisions, they followed the 1999 Assembly in deferring until 2001 any further action on standards of sexual conduct for church officers. But there were too many other issues that could not be ducked. Conservative presbyteries had sent up an unprecedented number of reform overtures that required a response.

A NARROW VICTORY FOR MARRIAGE

The single biggest unavoidable issue was "same-sex unions." Most Presbyterians had assumed that the question was settled long ago in the PCUSA constitution, with its definition of marriage as "a civil contract between a man and a woman." But a May decision by the church's highest court left the matter up in the air. The PCUSA Permanent Judicial Commission ruled that local churches were free to bless "same-sex unions" – as long as the persons involved understood that "the service to be conducted does not constitute a marriage ceremony."

The Assembly was pressed for a clearer answer. Its reply took the form of an amendment to the church's constitution proposed by San Joaquin Presbytery. The amendment would state that "God's intention for all people is to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or in chastity in singleness." Church property could not be used for, nor could church officers participate in, any ceremony of blessing upon relationships that violated that intention. This measure, passed on a 268-251 vote, will now go to the denomination's 173 local presbyteries for possible ratification.

The IRD's affiliate Presbyterian Action for Faith & Freedom took a stand for the traditional, biblical definition of marriage. "No other relationship is so fundamental to the healthy ordering of society," Presbyterian Action wrote to commissioners. "No other human relationship, except perhaps that between parent and child, is lifted up so highly in Scripture." Presbyterian Action warned the commissioners against anything that would "weaken the meaning of marriage."

Proponents of "same-sex unions" made their appeal on very different grounds. The minority report opposing the amendment said nothing about marriage. It spoke instead of "valuing the discretion of pastors and sessions in ordering worship" and "exploring the diversity of scriptural interpretation within our Reformed tradition." In other words, it disguised a momentous choice (to bless extra-marital relationships) in language



Young minister Kriss Bottino from San Joaquin Presbytery argued that NCC and WCC were not an adequate representation of Presbyterian ecumenism.

that implied a false neutrality ("exploring diversity").

Some of the most powerful speeches for the amendment came from the perspective of youth. The church "has a responsibility to provide a clear standard to upcoming generations," affirmed Youth Advisory Delegate Elizabeth O'Brien, from the Presbytery of the Peaks in Virginia. "If we bless what the Bible calls sin, what kind of standard are we setting?"

PROPPING UP THE NCC

The ongoing financial crisis at the National Council of Churches has also driven the PCUSA to make some hard choices. In February the General Assembly Council overlooked more than 1,000 letters of protest as it voted to contribute \$400,000 toward the NCC bailout. Likewise, in Long Beach the General Assembly showed its willingness to continue propping up the NCC.

The commissioners rejected overwhelmingly an overture from Savannah Presbytery that would have reallocated more than \$3 million in PCUSA ecumenical giving. The denomination's disproportionate contributions to the National and World Councils of Churches would have been reduced by over 65 percent, down to a level per member commensurate with the other six top U.S. donor denominations. The funds thus released would have been available for "other Christian organizations not affiliated with the WCC and NCC that also bear witness to the ecumenical hope of unity in Christ," according to the overture.

Presbyterian Action members gave testimony in favor of the Savannah overture. Mike Kruse of Kansas City, MO, contended that the two councils are not fully ecumenical. He cited statistics showing that 69 percent of U.S. Christians are not part of the NCC and 79 percent of the world's Christians have no ties to the WCC. Burl Watson of Tulsa, OK, observed that many Presbyterians feel "ill-served" by the councils' use of their offerings for divisive political causes. John Muller of Fort Worth, TX, pointed to the NCC's chronic mismanagement: "The NCC has not been a ten-talent steward of our beloved denomination's ecumenical talents. We should not be giving them all ten of our ecumenical talents."

The Presbyterian establishment quickly perceived the danger posed by the Savannah overture. A parade of ecclesiastical heavy hitters rose to warn against it. The PCUSA stated clerk, the moderator, and the General Assembly Council director all trooped before the committee that was debating the overture. The general secretary, the president, and the treasurer of the NCC all spent several days in Long Beach trying to shore up their support.

New NCC General Secretary Robert Edgar acknowledged past financial problems, but affirmed the content of the council's programs. "It is time to reignite the ecumenical movement," the NCC leader proclaimed. "We are moving the National Council of Churches in new directions." He promised that his new management team would balance the council's budget this



Clifton Kirkpatrick (right), Stated Clerk of the PCUSA General Assembly, confers with moderator Syngman Rhee (left) and NCC President Andrew Young. All three used their prestige to defend the embattled council.

year. He alluded to a "commitment by 2003 to open up the [ecumenical] table and bring Roman Catholics and Evangelicals to the table."

Most commissioners were swayed by all the prominent churchmen vouching for the NCC. Committee moderator Lynn Shurley, Jr., asked the Assembly to reject the overture "because we trust the leaders of these councils of which we have been partners for a long time, ... because we trust the promise of a balanced [NCC] budget that does not sacrifice present mission, ... and because we trust the General Assembly Council promise of oversight."

The overture was defeated on a 414-104 vote. But in view of the NCC's continuing troubles (see p. 5), the question of reforming or replacing the council may well confront Presbyterians again.

DIVERSITY IS THE BOTTOM LINE

Other decisions made at the Long Beach Assembly were a mixed lot:

The Rev. Syngman Rhee was elected as moderator, and the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick was re-elected as stated clerk. Both men are noted for their warm personal piety and their longtime enthusiasm for the NCC and WCC. In situations where dissidents are defying PCUSA constitutional standards on sexuality, both have preferred to stay neutral and encourage "dialogue" rather than enforce the constitution.

The Assembly approved a rules change that would put staff political advocacy on a tighter leash. In the past, denominational staff could cite any past Assembly action of any date as the basis for endorsing a political position today. Now they must be guided by "the most current policy document ... adopted by a General Assembly."

The Assembly opened a loophole that would allow more national church meetings to be closed. Now observers may be excluded whenever a "small group" meets to discuss "personal issues of faith and life."

Commissioners approved strong statements of solidarity with Christians persecuted for their faith in Pakistan, Sudan, and Indonesia. Unfortunately, they could not consistently say where their own faith would take its stand. 7

EPISCOPAL CHURCH GENERAL COINVENTION

Jubilee: Hallowed Time or Hollow Illusion?

By Abigail Noll and Diane Knippers

At a February 1999 meeting of Episcopal Church leaders, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold announced "Jubilee" as the theme for the July 2000 General Convention in Denver. The word "Jubilee" refers to an Old Testament provision that every fifty years all Israelites would be released from the burdens of debt and slavery and restored to right relationships with God and one another (Leviticus 25).

Griswold's notion seemed to be that this year's Convention should be a time of healing dialogue rather than divisive and coercive legislation. He sought to cultivate within the church "a diverse center, with divergent and passionate views, but who are bound together in such a way that we can't dismiss one another, but remain committed to listen to one another."

After the Convention was over, Bishop Griswold professed his satisfaction: "When I first thought of jubilee as a Convention theme, I don't think I fully understood what it might mean if we took seriously the richly biblical notion of jubilee.... Dare I say, our faithful journey was in accord with the divine imagination, and not our best plans?" Griswold expressed his joy that the Episcopal Church is "a community that day by day is growing beyond compromise and conflict into communion."

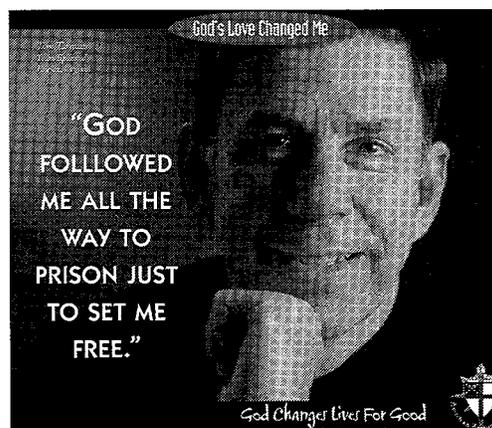
JUBILEE CONTRADICTED

The Presiding Bishop's conclusions left many of us wondering if we had attended the same event. Did this General Convention *really* manifest a Jubilee spirit? Several serious actions ran contrary to the theme of freedom and restoration for God's people. At the same time, we could not overlook God's gracious signs of hope manifested in international efforts and youthful faces.

The Convention did include daily Eucharists, and one morning was scheduled to be free of legislative decisions. Nevertheless, an observer would be hard-pressed to say that the General Convention took on a less political, more restful manner. The most obvious contradiction of Griswold's jubilee vision was manifested, rather predictably, in the most charged debate to face the mainline churches this year – human sexuality.

Prior to General Convention, Episcopalians on both sides of the sexuality decision prepared texts, testimonies, resolutions, and strategies for winning the debate on homosexual unions. During Convention, various outside groups demonstrated to express their particular convictions. These ranged from pro-homosexual groups like Mel White's Soulforce to anti-homosexual

extremists like Kansas pastor Fred Phelps. Within the church, the gay lobby called Integrity hosted a communion service where only homosexual clergy and bishops were robed for procession. The orthodox American Anglican Council (with which the IRD worked closely) sponsored a "God's Love Changed Me" campaign centered on testimonies of individuals.



An ad campaign by the American Anglican Council promoted the changing power of God's grace.

The major piece of legislation on sexuality prepared before the Convention was a proposal for "local option" that would have allowed each diocese to set its own standards regarding homosexual "unions." That initiative was "dead on arrival" at the Convention. But another resolution emerged as the central vehicle for a legislative show-down. The final "resolved" clause of D039 would have authorized the development of liturgical rites for non-marital unions. This section was narrowly defeated after exhaustive and highly charged debate.

MARRIAGE IS ONLY 'ACKNOWLEDGED'

The rest of D039 was adopted with virtually no plenary attention. The inconsistency of this resolution reveals that lack of debate and reflection. Its central flaw is that it treats marriage as morally equivalent to non-marital sexual relationships. Ironically, the resolution does not even mention homosexuality, but it implies that there is "holy love" in extramarital sexual relationships. Married and unmarried alike are admonished to exhibit fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, and "the holy love that enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God." The resolution "acknowledges" the "Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage," but also "acknowledges" that some Episcopalians are living

in non-marital "life-long committed relationships." It claims that those who disagree with the traditional teaching of the church and who act in contradiction to that teaching do so in "good conscience."

In the end, marriage is treated as just one possible external *form* to hold the internal *content* of relationship – love. Absent is the idea that God has ordained marriage and prohibited other sexual relationships.

Several other resolutions passed that do not reflect the unity of the church. One example of a questionable resolution "recommends that all clergy in charge of congregations and vestries ... encourage the Boy Scouts of America to allow membership to youth and adult leaders irrespective of sexual orientation."

In another push for liberal hegemony, the Convention directed that a task force be established to "assist" three dissenting dioceses to achieve full compliance with a new canon law requiring the ordination of women. Even many who fully support the ordination of women argued against such an aggressive intrusion into a diocese. The action defied the international Anglican Communion's consensus that there "should be no compulsion on any bishop in matters concerning ordination and licensing" of women.

HOPEFUL SIGNS

The question is, do orthodox Episcopalians have hope for Jubilee release and restoration, regardless of the Convention's contradictions? Several legislative initiatives offered some encouragement. The IRD assisted the American Anglican Council and friends in submitting at least 29 pro-active resolutions at General Convention. Of these, 17 were adopted and three referred to standing committees. We helped the church take important stands on topics such as opposing religious persecution abroad, teaching sexual abstinence to youth, developing ministries for those suffering from post-abortion stress, and expanding ecumenical relations with Evangelicals and with the continuing Anglican churches.

The IRD particularly brought attention to the genocide in Sudan. Our Sudan Campaign featured daily demonstrations in front of the Colorado Convention Center as well as a candlelight vigil attended by over one hundred people. The program included prayers by Sudanese Archbishop Joseph Marona and Bishop Peter Munde, as well as a plea for action presented by former U.S. Senator Bill Armstrong. In response, the General Convention adopted a resolution that urged advocacy

on behalf of persecuted Christians in Sudan. The Convention also passed resolutions of solidarity with persecuted Christians in Pakistan and Indonesia.

Such international initiatives can only help to keep the troubled Episcopal Church in closer contact with the healthier worldwide Anglican Communion. But a source of hope even closer to home was the participation in Convention of a group of young reformers called Rumors of Hope. Whether it was blue-haired, crew-cut Sarah Guest testifying for biblical authority in the sexuality hearings or veiled Elizabeth Vice pleading for an end to the blasphemy law in Pakistan, these young activists were seen and heard in Denver.

THE REMNANT IS YOUNG

Twenty-year-old Melissa Bixler, the legislative team coordinator of Rumors of Hope, has an expanding vision of how young people will reform our church:

"There is a sense of hope that our generation, if given the chance, will be able to work for the reconciliation of the Episcopal Church to the Lordship of Christ. God will always call his remnant back to Himself. I believe he will begin with a chosen generation, committed to truth and love. This is our time. All over the country orthodox young men and women are beginning to emerge on the fringes of the national stage to demand a response from our leaders. We have the lineage of 2000 years of faithful reformers, the support of our churches, and the conviction that something must change and must change now."

Running concurrent with the General Convention was one of the largest gatherings of Episcopal youth in American history. The American Anglican Council sponsored Y2K4JC at the University of Colorado, leading 1500 kids and youth leaders into a deeper understanding of worship and service for Jesus Christ. The Rumors of Hope team went to Y2K4JC on the last day and shared its vision, recruiting other youth to join in transforming their church.

Presiding Bishop Griswold's ambiguous Jubilee did not evidently bring Episcopalians any closer to one another. Nor was it apparent that the church had been released from compromising relationships with human sin and restored to God's righteousness. Yet God's promises for Jubilee will not be forever deferred. The promise of true freedom for his people may be accomplished through the least likely means – the poor, the persecuted, and the young. 7

Soulforce demonstrators protest outside the Episcopal Convention in Denver.



CHURCH-BACKED GROUP IN CHINA: A COMPROMISED SITUATION

By Mark Tooley

The Amity Foundation is the only organization in China through which most U.S. Protestant churches funnel their mission dollars. This situation is almost unique in the world. U.S. churches typically cooperate with a wide range of local church groups in almost every other country. But in China, there is just one church partner: Amity. Why the monopoly?

During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, the Chinese communist regime tried to eradicate religion. Having failed to do so, the government decided that regulating religious bodies would better serve its interests. The government's overriding concern, spelled out in official policy statements, is to stop the churches from becoming a haven for independent thinking and political dissidence, as they did in Eastern Europe. It would also like to inculcate in Chinese Christians a "patriotic" duty to support the Communist Party line.

Amity and its affiliated religious groups in China are an outgrowth of that policy.

It was founded in 1985 as an officially sanctioned conduit for relief, teaching, and publishing activities by foreign churches. Almost all of its \$6.3 million annual

budget comes from U.S. and other Western churches. U.S. donors include the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the National Council of Churches (NCC), the American Baptist Churches, and even the conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

These supporting denominations like to advertise Amity's many admirable projects: its publication of 26 million Bibles, its language-teaching program, health care, and other social services. More than 1,000 foreign teachers have worked in Chinese schools through Amity. And Amity claims to have trained 13,000 rural Chinese doctors.

But the denominations do not tell their members about Amity's ties to the Chinese government. They do not highlight Amity's role as a tool for government regulation of church activities, and as a defender of government crackdowns against those who refuse to accept the regulation. They give little clue that Amity's religious intentions, as expressed through its publications, are unusually vague.

'OUR WORK IS NOT RELIGIOUS'

Skeptics point out that Amity is a partner of the China Christian Council, which was founded in 1980 as the Chinese government's official organization for Protestants. And skeptics note that Amity disavows any specific evangelistic or religious purpose. "Our work is not religious, but to serve China's neediest," explains one Amity official. Some of its employees claim a Christian affiliation, but others do not.

Amity's founder and chairman, Bishop Ding Guangxun, is also a Chinese government official. Bishop Ding serves as vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. He is also honorary chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of the Protestant Churches of China, another governmental effort to control religious activity in China. Amity's general secretary is Wenzao Han, who is president of the China Christian Council.

Amity forbids its foreign volunteers from evangelizing, urging them to express their faith "through service rather than proselytization." Undoubtedly there are still some volunteers who do share their faith discreetly. But the Chinese government prefers to retain some control over these activities. Chinese law prohibits Amity

STRIVE TO FULFILL THE BEAUTIFUL WISHES

OUR DREAM



面对新的千年，新的世纪，爱德人充满了爱的信念与梦想。我们将与各界友好人士一起，携手共进，奋斗不息！

It is hard to find a distinct Christian message in Amity literature. The caption in the brochure above states that Amity's dream is "to share love with more people in the new millennium."

volunteers from importing religious materials "whose content is harmful to the public interest." They also may not form their own religious organizations, may not preach to even recognized congregations without official approval, and may not ordain clergy.

Concerned over Chinese government control, the Southern Baptist Convention attempted to work through Amity while continuing to dispatch missionaries through unofficial channels. This "two-track" policy would have allowed Southern Baptists to minister both to official churches in China and also to unofficial "house churches" not affiliated with Amity. But retaliation came swiftly in 1997, with Amity cutting all ties to the Southern Baptists and the government expelling all their known missionaries. The Amity News Service dutifully conveyed the government's charge of "deception" by the Southern Baptists.

DENYING AND JUSTIFYING PERSECUTION

The Amity News Service, which is aimed at Western readers, is a faithful defender of Chinese government policy towards religion. It regularly publishes denials by official Chinese religious leaders of serious religious persecution. Rebutting Western "propaganda" against China is a major theme for Amity.

In 1997, for example, the Amity News Service published a statement by Bishop Ding, then head of the China Christian Council, that condemned U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright for drawing attention to religious persecution around the world. The bishop characterized Albright's concern as a "present-day operation of the 19th century American 'manifest destiny.'" He added, "I feel strongly that any U.S. government intervention as 'Protector of Religion' in the name of religious liberty would only jeopardize what we have been doing ourselves and [potentially violate] our principles of self-government."

Another article in the Amity News Service likened Chinese imprisonment of an apocalyptic preacher to the U.S. government's actions against the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. "We can only enjoy the security of the law and the rights bestowed by the law if we conform to the law," insisted a Chinese religious official. "Otherwise, we must receive the penalty of the law."

Still another article, featuring an interview with Han Wenzao, justified state restrictions on the "illegal and heretical activities" occurring in unsanctioned churches. "This is the practice everywhere in the world, so why not in China?" Han asked. He also complained about reports of persecution against house churches, which he dismissed. Rather than defending fellow believers suffering for their faith, Amity leaders denounce them and even deny that they are Christian.

Amity News Service has carried a defense of Chinese

policy towards Tibet, commending its "peaceful liberation" by the Chinese Army, and defending the right of the Chinese government to select a new Panchen Lama. The Dalai Lama, it lamented, was "far off in India" and was "transgressing the religious rituals" of Tibet by trying to identify the successor Panchen Lama. The Dalai Lama should be "censured," the article declared.

In 1996 Human Rights Watch/Asia alleged that Chinese orphanages routinely allow infants to starve to death. The well-documented report alleged that the deaths resulted not from lack of funding, but from lack of interest in sustaining the lives of babies who were born in violation of China's one-child-per-couple-policy. Amity attacked Human Rights Watch, claiming it "employed highly charged rhetoric but [failed] to substantiate many claims."

U.S. CHURCHES SHOULD FIND THIS RELATIONSHIP UNCOMFORTABLE

According to Amity, China has 14 million Protestants. But its figure does not include tens of millions of believers in unofficial house churches. In its public statements, Amity largely ignores the existence of house church Christians, except to deny their persecution or harassment by the Chinese government.

A recent delegation of Amity and other church leaders to the U.S. emphasized that all is well with China's legitimate religious believers. "There is no massive persecution of Christians in China today," the Rev. Jiayuan Bao assured Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) officials during a meeting. Bao, the associate general secretary of the China Christian Council, asserted: "A lot of what is being reported as 'persecution of Christians' could better be termed 'religious persecution' because it is directed toward cultic groups and activities."

Bao and the other Chinese church leaders struck an agreement with Presbyterian officials "to devote more attention to education in our churches, so as to overcome misunderstandings about one another." Presumably that "education" will include denials of any religious persecution in China.

U.S. churches cannot be entirely faulted for cooperating with the Amity Foundation. Its teaching and relief activities potentially allow the opportunity for a discreet Christian witness. But U.S. churches can be faulted for ignoring Amity's obvious limitations, and especially for often transmitting Amity's denials of serious religious persecution problems in China.

It is an irony that U.S. denominations that boast of their "holistic" ministry have so readily consented to restrictions that prevent such ministry in China — i.e. no evangelism, limited Christian education, and of course no "prophetic" critiques of social injustice in China. The relationship with Amity ought to be a more uncomfortable one.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

CLOUDS DARKENING FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN RUSSIA

By Lawrence Uzzell

American Protestant missionaries serving in Russia are not really interested in spreading the Gospel, but in serving as agents of a U.S. government conspiracy to seize control of Russia's Pacific coast. Such is the view expressed by a Russian government document recently obtained by the Keston Institute. Its authors flatly declare that the U.S. intelligence services "make active use of religious preachers from the U.S.A., Canada, and South Korea." They call for tighter state controls to protect Russia from this "religious invasion."

Moscow now views religion increasingly through the lens of "national security." One of Vladimir Putin's first official acts after succeeding to Boris Yeltsin at the end of 1999 was to sign a new

while trampling on the Russian people. The harsh 1997 law restoring state control over religious life was actually enforced more strictly against indigenous Russian Baptists and other disfavored minorities than against foreign religious workers. It was the native-born Russian pastor, especially one who lacked connections with wealthy foreign patrons, who was most likely to have his applications to rent public meeting places refused. But during the last year, and especially since Putin's rise to the presidency, foreigners have also begun to experience such restrictions.

The new trend toward repression is not consistent; it varies widely from one province to another, and many foreign missionaries are still able to operate freely in Russia. But the last year has seen a significant increase in the number of western Protestant missionaries expelled from the country. This phenomenon is rarely discussed publicly since the missionaries themselves often prefer to keep their expulsions confidential—sometimes fearing reprisals against the congregations which they have left behind, sometimes hoping to return to Russia with visas ostensibly unrelated to religion. But a major investigation by Keston, published in July, found that Oregon Baptist Dan Polard was right to insist that his well-publicized expulsion from Russia's Far East was not an isolated case. (For more information on this and on other attacks on religious freedom in the former Soviet Union, see Keston's website <www.keston.org>.)

Life is also becoming more precarious for indigenous Protestants. The province

of Sakha in northeastern Siberia—previously considered one of the most tolerant in all of Russia—has been witnessing increased harassment of the independent *'initsiativniki'* Baptists. These staunchly uncompromising Christians split from the semi-establishment Baptist Union four decades ago, refusing to yield to the Soviet authorities on issues such as teaching religion to children.

Roman Catholics usually have escaped such harassment. This is not because anti-Catholic attitudes are less prevalent than anti-Protestant views among Russia's officials. (If anything, the reverse is true.) It is rather because the global, centralized structure of the Catholic Church makes individual Roman Catholic parishes less vulnerable than their Protestant counterparts. But foreign priests and nuns serving in Russia often experience arbitrary bureaucratic difficulties, such as requirements that they leave the country every three months simply to have their visas renewed. Russia's Roman Catholics continue to meet obstacles in their struggle to recover church buildings and other properties which Stalin stole from their forebears.

Another ominous sign was the Putin administration's recent interference in the internal affairs of Russia's Jewish community. Since June Moscow has been watching a struggle between two rival Jewish factions; each claims that its leader is Russia's "chief rabbi." The Kremlin has clearly thrown its weight for the newcomer and against the longstanding incumbent, who is allied with out-of-favor media oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky.

Like Boris Yeltsin before him, President Putin likes to present himself to western audiences as a pillar of reform and of rule by law. At least in the area of religious freedom, his actions so far suggest the opposite. f



Newly elected Russian President Vladimir Putin greets Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexiy II. Putin has taken steps that threaten the freedoms of religious minorities.

national-security doctrine declaring missionaries to be agents of foreign influence and threats to Russia.

Until recently, western missionaries serving in Russia could usually count on an age-old custom of the Russian state—that of lavishing hospitality on foreigners

Lawrence Uzzell is the director of the Keston Institute, a British-based group that monitors religious freedom in the former Eastern bloc.

FROM THE PEWS

A POOR ANALOGY

By Joy J. Moore



The 2000 General Conference of the United Methodist Church gave me pause as I recognized my own desire no longer to function as a modernist. Modernity often functions to define oneself not *against* the past but *detached from* it. I had done as much in defining myself as American, an attempt to detach

myself from a painful African American past. The activity at General Conference called me to another reality. This history can no longer be forgotten or rewritten.

The demonstrations related to homosexuality appropriated the songs, substance, and style of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The debates continually shouted statements of inclusivity and diversity above whispered questions of morality. I find myself feeling as if a portion of African-American history is being seduced to serve another cause. The design of the movement is being retooled before the original goal is fully achieved.

Comparisons have been made to relate the struggle of persons of African descent in America to contemporary efforts to approve homosexual practice. The historic quest for civil rights embraced the efforts of persons seeking human rights in a free society. Unlike biblical accounts of slavery, America determined slaves to be not fully human on account of their black African origin. One catalyst which influenced the civil rights movement of the '60s was the struggle to acknowledge that persons of color are morally, intellectually, biologically, and spiritually human, and, by the United States Constitution, granted certain rights. This premise challenged a society that had convinced itself that a certain group of people were incapable of comprehending, adopting, or enacting the morality and shared values of the culture.

But in fact past generations of African-Americans had accepted the culture. Its laws, morality, opportunity for education and the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness fit their human aspirations. It was systemic racism that refused to believe that Blacks shared American values or dreamed the American dream.

Today's discussion of acting on one's sexual attractions is more appropriately a question of morality than justice. At issue is not individual orientation, but a demand that what once was a moral wrong now be deemed a civil right. In questioning whether practicing homosexuals may serve as examples of our society's ethic, the society must identify that ethic. Is sex outside of marriage morally acceptable?

In practice, the evidence would suggest that our society does accept sex outside of marriage. But for the Christian, the redefinition is not simply left to a majority vote. We must remember the biblical design for marriage as a union between a male and a female.

Consider the question of inter-racial marriage. This was not about different values or inconsistent understandings of marriage and sex. Rather the opponents of inter-racial marriage subtly questioned if a white human should be yoked with a less-than-human black. The institution of marriage, the uniting of a man and woman, was not being challenged. But today's gay rights movement is trying to redefine the institution.

Christian biblical interpretation must always conform to the divine call to be a counter-cultural people. Homosexual orientation is but another evidence of the natural human propensity to sin. Today's culture would redefine that moral standard. Yesterday's culture wrestled to redefine humanity. It was (and remains) counter-cultural to acknowledge that when describing community, human difference is not genetically defined.

While all political and social struggles bear similarity, a person's sexual persuasion and practice—attraction and activity—is not comparable to genetic make-up. One's genetic code neither establishes nor defines values and morals. In the shouts for justice, these whispered questions are not yet addressed. Are we as a society still convinced that certain groups of people are incapable of comprehending, adopting or enacting certain shared values of the culture? Or, are the cries really to change those values?

The motifs of the civil rights movement, captured in songs, substance and style, contain the heritage of hope for a people still vying for full participation in society. The analogy between that movement and the striving to change moral definitions evident in the gay rights movement misses that struggle.

The Rev. Joy J. Moore is Director of Student Life at Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, KY.

ELECTION WATCH

CANDIDATES MORE RELIGIOUS— Churches a Bit Less Partisan

By Steve R. Rempel

At times, the 2000 presidential election appeared to take on the nature of an old-time Gospel revival. Both George W. Bush and Al Gore were quick to point out the importance of their personal religious beliefs, and each made direct appeals to the faithful. And, just when it seemed that Bush was pushing his faith into the background, suddenly the Democrats got religion in a big way.

Senator Joseph Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, proclaimed his nomination to the vice presidency a “miracle.” He called on Americans to “renew the dedication of our nation and ourselves to God.” The candidate promised that a Gore-Lieberman administration would “bring truth to power – the truth of faith and the power of values that flow from it.”

Meanwhile, Vice President Gore held weekly conference calls with a circle of African-American ministers. He asked them to “do the work of the Lord” in turning out the vote. One of the ministers prayed that God would grant “success and victory on Election Day.”

With all this talk about religion, one might have imagined that church leaders would be thrilled. Old-line Protestant leaders, in particular, might have seized upon this campaign as a golden opportunity. Perhaps 2000 could be the year in which liberal Christianity reclaimed its influence within the public square, after so many years of being overshadowed by more conservative versions of the faith.

In reality, however, church leaders of all stripes seemed unusually reluctant to jump into the partisan fray. Despite the fascination of the secular media with the religious overtones of the election, the official denominational voices were strangely silent.

There were probably a variety of reasons for this reticence. Roman Catholics were conflicted over the choices between candidates and parties. Conservative Evangelicals were clearly inclined toward the Republicans; however, their denominations have historically been shy about saying so publicly. Parachurch leaders such as James Dobson took the hints from Bush that they could best help his cause by piping down.

DENOMINATIONS MASTER TECHNIQUES FOR TILTING

Oldline church leaders had not completely given up their political activism of years past. But they had learned the techniques by which pressure groups of all sorts manage to be very political, without being overtly partisan. Church bodies did not directly endorse

candidates or parties. But they presented the issues in a way that aligned unambiguously with one side in the election. And they delegated the activities that bordered most closely on partisanship to independent groups like the Interfaith Alliance. In addition, some church officials let their preferences show in “personal” remarks.

A good example of this approach was the “2000 Election Booklet” distributed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The booklet did not mention parties or candidates. Instead it surveyed 16 issue areas, citing Presbyterian General Assembly statements on each. Presbyterians were “encouraged to make [these perspectives] a part of this year’s political campaigns.”

The positions favored were a litany of liberalism: supporting affirmative action, abortion rights, gun control, a higher minimum wage, a national medical plan, the Kyoto Global Climate Accords, and the United Nations; opposing school vouchers and privatized prisons. With scant scriptural basis given for any of these positions, readers would be hard-pressed to discern whether the document emanated from a church body or the Democratic National Committee.

A similar political bent could be found on the website of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church. Although the board did not make any direct comments about parties or candidates, most of the positions it advocated were well to the left of the majority of UM church members. In at least one instance, the website appeared to contradict the Methodist Book of Discipline. Regarding homosexual “unions,” which the discipline rejects, the Board of Church and Society chose to quote George McClain, head of the unofficial, left-leaning Methodist Federation for Social Action. McClain alleged that opponents of such unions were possessed by the demons of fear, ignorance, arrogance, and control.

By contrast, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops offered a delicately balanced examination of the presidential candidates. The conference’s questionnaire asked the candidates to address 17 issues ranging from abortion to agricultural policy. The answers were printed verbatim.

ALTERNATIVE CHANNELS FOR PARTISANSHIP

Another platform often used by church leaders is the “faith-based organization.” Of these, the National Council of Churches is the most prominent. Like the oldline denominations that it claims to represent, the

NCC was careful not to create the appearance of endorsing any candidate. Current NCC officials have invested most of their energy in leftist causes about which both parties are ambivalent – e.g., ending the U.S. embargo against Cuba and canceling the debts of impoverished countries. NCC General Secretary Robert Edgar even stated that he accepts the religious sincerity of each of the major party candidates for president and vice-president.

A closer look at key individuals within the organization, however, reveals the NCC to be anything but non-partisan. Both Edgar and NCC President Andrew Young are former Democratic representatives who served in Congress with Al Gore. Edgar's predecessor as general secretary, Joan Brown Campbell, is a long-time friend of the Gore family who used to meet with Gore on an almost-weekly basis. In addressing the Ohio delegation at this year's Democratic Convention, Campbell lauded Gore's strong and quiet faith.

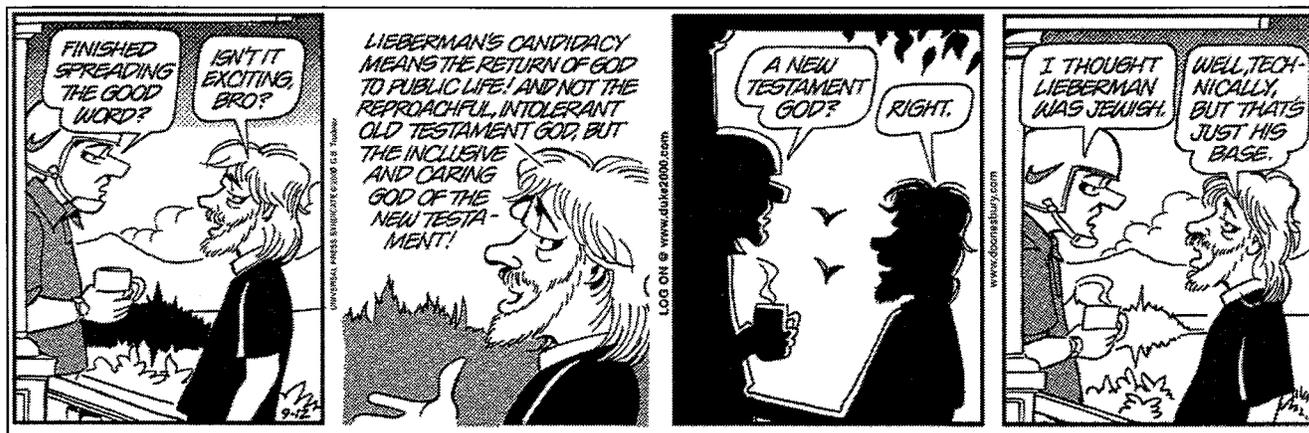
While the NCC may be softening its image, the same cannot be said of another organization headed by many of the same oldline church leaders. The Interfaith Alliance, an ostensibly "non-partisan" organization founded to foster better relations between religious groups, has made combating the "Religious Right" its

and less effective results.

Such bias did not end with the 1996 elections. During the Democratic Convention this year in Los Angeles, the Interfaith Alliance hosted a symposium entitled "Challenging the Religious Right in the Language of Faith: Success Stories." Two of the three panelists were Democratic Party operatives. And on the last day of the convention, the Interfaith Alliance president, Jane Holmes Dixon, led a tribute to Al Gore on the convention floor. Dixon, an auxiliary Episcopal bishop in Washington, DC, considers herself a longtime friend of the vice president.

CAN WE SPEAK OF PROGRESS?

That the Interfaith Alliance, the NCC, and oldline agencies maintain a bias toward the left should come as no surprise. What is new is the toned-down rhetoric, the avoidance of discussing candidates except in a personal context. There are several possible reasons for the shift: After years of criticizing the Religious Right for its partisanship, liberal church leaders may be reluctant to expose themselves to the charge of hypocrisy. They may also feel hesitant to put themselves on the line again for a Democratic candidate. Despite the



The nomination of Joseph Lieberman complicated the view of many liberal clergy who had previously objected to politicians expressing an orthodox Christian faith.

raison d'être. Baptist minister C. Welton Gaddy, executive director of the alliance, accused conservative Christians of "manipulating sacred scriptures to justify their political positions, reinforcing existing religious polarization, misrepresenting the diverse views held by faith communities, and belittling the integrity of other religious traditions." This was said without any acknowledgment of the irony that the Interfaith Alliance itself engages in the very same practices.

Primary targets for the Alliance have been the voter guides produced by the Christian Coalition. According to the alliance website, these guides were "blatantly partisan." Not mentioned on the website was the fact that the alliance produced its own voter guides for the 1996 national elections, with an equally partisan slant

moral cover that oldline leaders provided to President Clinton during the impeachment crisis, many felt disillusioned that he accomplished so little for their favorite causes.

Oldline leaders also have to be looking over their shoulders at the trend toward conservatism in their own denominations. Regular church attenders have long tended to hold more conservative views, and a recent poll by Barna Research indicates that even clergy in NCC denominations leaned toward George W. Bush in this election. In this situation, as their power and their policies are challenged within the churches, oldline officials may be less inclined to venture out into the partisan arena. This altered attitude counts as modest progress for the cause of church reform. 7

CANDIDATES AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: Not Mere Partisan Posturing

By Stanley Carlson-Thies

Should faith-based organizations play a larger role in delivering welfare and social services to people in need? Given the indifference or even hostility of many Americans, especially the elite, to religion in the public square, what a surprise that this was a serious question on the 2000 presidential campaign trail. And even more of a surprise, both major-party candidates said they endorsed a larger role. Furthermore, their positions were more than mere campaign rhetoric to tickle the ears of backers and undecided voters.

Serving the needy is no new mission for religious organizations, of course, but rather a central part of their calling. Nor is collaboration between government and religious organizations to serve the poor unprecedented. Despite government's predominant role in social services—due in part to private and religious failures—it has often acted by funding other organizations, including religious ones, to provide the actual services. Prominent examples are the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and Jewish Federations, all of which receive government funds along with private donations to carry out their work.

But the collaboration has been very constricted. Presuming a separationist interpretation of the Constitution, the typical law requires religion to be set far to the side if a group receives government money. Practice has been much more flexible, but in theory funds are to go only to “religiously-affiliated” organiza-

tions that will provide secular services. The new idea, matching the Supreme Court's growing approval of the concept of “neutrality” in place of separationism, is that “faith-based” organizations should be able openly to take part, and without stripping religion away.

That's the concept of “charitable choice,” first adopted as part of the 1996 federal welfare reform law. When choosing providers, officials should seek the most effective

programs without discriminating against some as sectarian or too religious. Faith-based providers can retain their religious character, while making sure that people needing help are not religiously coerced and the government funds are used only for the public purpose of effective assistance. Officials keep the new providers accountable the same as others and ensure that beneficiaries who object to religion have a secular alternative.

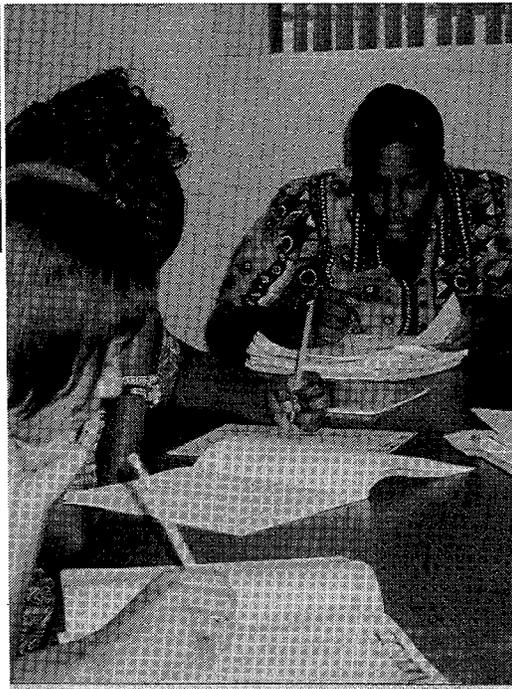
So here is a carefully crafted new approach, designed to make government hospitable to faith-based organizations that choose to collaborate with the public sector. States, which are supposed to bring their own rules into alignment with the new federal requirements, have been slow to come into compliance. But the charitable choice spirit, if not always the letter, has started to restructure welfare assistance. In Maryland, for example, officials turned to a large African American congregation, Payne Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church, for services that could enable hundreds of the hardest-to-employ women to enter the workforce.

Charitable choice currently applies only to welfare services and to some programs for low-income neighborhoods, but many in Congress have been working for its expansion. However, public opinion has been divided. Some are worried because accepting government money still carries risks; many more of the critics oppose allowing faith to play a larger role in government-funded services. Compared to reintroducing school prayer, on the one side, or simply expanding government welfare, on the other, charitable choice is hardly the big crowd pleaser for either Republicans or Democrats.

So it was a strong sign of seriousness about policy that the Bush and Gore campaigns did not simply endorse some vague idea of rescuing the needy by setting loose America's religious forces. They have, against some skepticism and even opposition in their own ranks, specifically and strongly proposed implementing and expanding charitable choice. This is a far cry from past Republican dreams of simply substituting church and charity for the welfare state and from conventional Democratic support for not-very-religious religious providers. Making government and faith-based programs allies requires the utmost care, so we can rejoice that both Bush and Gore have gotten beyond slogans. **f**

Stanley Carlson-Thies is Director of Social Policy Studies at the Center for Public Justice.

This GED class at Payne Memorial AME Church in Baltimore is an example of the kind of faith-based social service for which both presidential candidates expressed support.



IRD DIARY

LESSONS IN ASKING

By Jerald Walz

I should have known that fundraising was going to be a part of my life. I began at the early age of seven. The members of the United Methodist church my dad was serving as pastor had determined that a new parsonage was needed. Not knowing where the funds would come from, they decided to act upon faith and pray that in one designated Sunday God would raise the money.

The excitement must have been intense, because I distinctly remember asking my dad if I could give the first dollar. He agreed. At a special time in the service, my dad indicated that the offering for the new parsonage would be received. He asked the ushers to come forward and the lay leader to pray. I was standing next to him at the pulpit. After the prayer, my dad took the plates and turned toward me. In what must have seemed a grandiose gesture, I held up my dollar between both hands and dropped it into the plate. In that single offering the members of the church gave over half of the necessary funds for the new parsonage. Before the completion of the construction, the entire amount was received.

Despite my success in this first development endeavor, for some reason I grew to dislike fundraising. By the time I was asked to lead the senior class gift campaign in college, I was reluctant. It is not easy to *ask*; there is always fear of rejection. Swallowing my pride and facing the risk, I began to visit with my classmates and seek their support.

Our goal was \$15,000. The goal was not unrealistic, but a great deal of work would fall on my shoulders. There were some classmates who did not participate, but there were far more who eagerly said "yes" and made a pledge. My classmates pledged over \$13,000 and we finally exceeded our goal. I realized that the success of this small campaign was more the result of my fellow classmates than me. I only asked; they gave.

I was already learning important lessons that have now been echoed in my work with the IRD. Attending a Christian Stewardship Association seminar this past February, I was struck with three wise principles.

First, fundraising approached in faith reaps rewards. When a campaign goal is developed through prayer and through honest assessment of potential giving, expectations are not raised to unreachable levels. Reliance upon the grace of God is the key. As the hymn states, "This is my Father's World." As we move in tune with the heart of God and act in faith, "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus."

Second, development should be relational. Giving is not about the bottom line. It is about real relationships and concerns. It is about keeping in contact with friends who share those concerns. It is the sharing of a vision, the cultivation of new relationships, and the ministry



*Jerald
Walz*

of compassion that will determine the success of a campaign. As someone who works in fundraising, I want more and more to cultivate meaningful relationships between IRD and our supporters.

Third, as the Scripture says, "You have not because you ask not." The seminar leader could not stress enough that in order to receive you must ask. That is part of the act of faith. This also leaves the decision to the donor. When asked appropriately and without high-pressure tactics, most donors will answer honestly and positively. Often you will be surprised at the generous response.

I could not have known as a seven-year-old that I would be involved in development as an adult. But the lessons learned then have been confirmed. God truly never wastes anything. While you consider gifts to the IRD, we want you to know that we consider them gifts from God. We will use them wisely and endeavor to relate to you personally. As we face challenges in raising funds to expand IRD's reform efforts in the Church, we place our trust in the One who supplies all our needs. f

HATE CRIME LAWS: NOT NECESSARILY THE SOLUTION

By Diane Knippers

My husband Ed grew up in rural south Georgia. He has told me about a terrible attack on an African-American couple that will always fill me with anger and revulsion. The couple was active in their local NAACP chapter during the height of the civil rights movement. They were honest, hard-working, God-fearing people. One night, the entire front of their rural home was sprayed with machine-gun fire. A front bedroom was destroyed. Had they been sleeping in that bedroom on that night, they would have been slaughtered.

Our natural reaction to crimes based on bigotry is to cry out not simply for justice, but also for vengeance. Such crimes are acts of terror, not just against innocent

individuals, but also against an entire community. The perpetrators of these heinous crimes should be prosecuted, convicted, and punished. I have had increasing second thoughts, however, about the special "hate crime" legislation that has been championed by so many church leaders.

I want to make a provocative argument. Rather than advocating for the expansion of hate crime statutes, I believe the church should call for their reduction. I've come to understand that hate crimes legislation isn't about criminal justice—it's about criminalizing unpopular ideas and fostering identity politics. In the end, hate crime legislation will have unintended consequences that will rip apart, rather than restore, our social fabric.

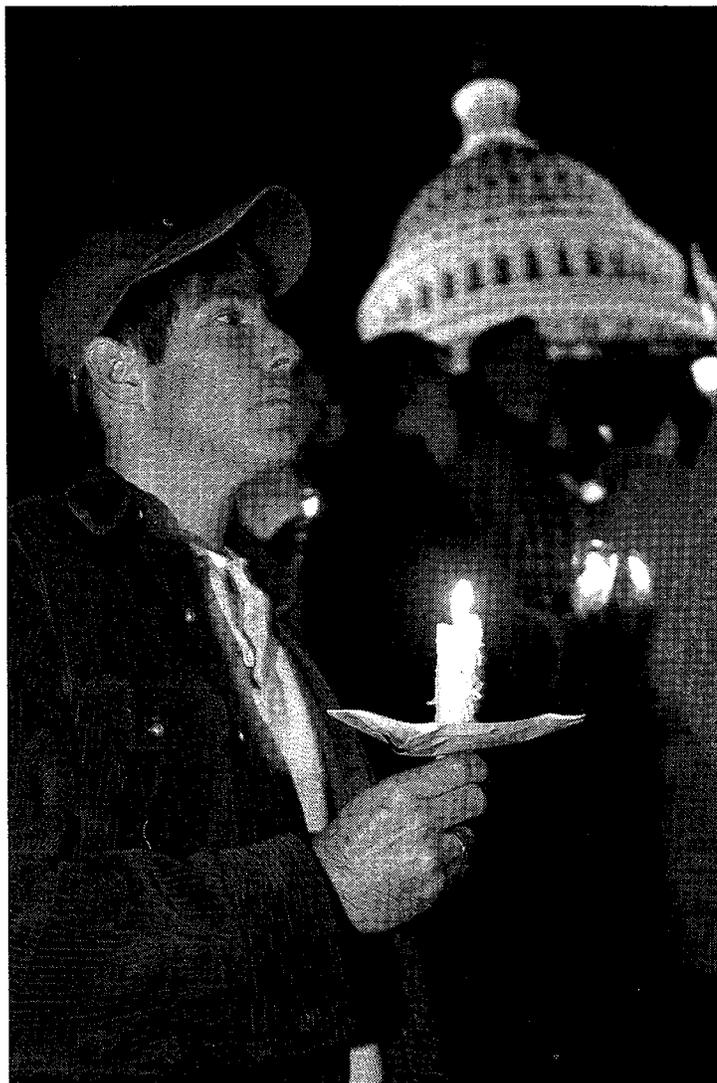
What are hate crimes? Why do people want hate crime legislation?

In their book, *Hate Crime Laws: Criminal Law and Identity Politics*, James Jacobs and Kimberly Potter offer the following definition: "Hate crime laws *recriminalize* or *enhance the punishment* of an ordinary crime when the criminal's motive manifests a legislatively designated prejudice like racism or anti-Semitism."

The campaign for hate crime laws isn't really about punishing crime, but about the status of victims. The most terrible atrocities about which we hear so often would be crimes—in some states, capital crimes—even without hate crime legislation.

The best justification for hate crime laws is that hate crimes not only target the individual victim, but also threaten a whole class of persons, doing greater damage than other crimes and thus deserving greater punishment. Interestingly, however, as much social terror may stem from random violence without prejudice as a motive. For example, all of Washington, DC, was in shock over the shooting of several young children at the National Zoo last Easter Monday. This wouldn't be considered a hate crime, but it had the same effect on our community as a hate crime—shock, fear, frustration, helplessness.

Hate crime laws *require* discrimination. There must be discrimination among various possible groups to identify which ones get a specially protected status. And there must be discrimination among various types of social prejudice to determine which ones deserve special punishment. According to Jacobs and Potter, "the



A young man holds a candle at a rally in memory of slain homosexual Matthew Shepard. Many church leaders have suggested that hate crime legislation would protect victims like Shepard better than current murder laws.

current anti-hate crime movement is generated not by an epidemic of unprecedented bigotry but by heightened sensitivity to prejudice and, more important, by our society's emphasis on identity politics."

What are three negative consequences of hate crime laws?

† **STIFFER SENTENCES, ESPECIALLY FOR JUVENILES.** One thing that amazes me is that those who push for hate crime legislation—which usually involves stiffer sentencing—are not usually the get-tough-with-crime types. You could very easily argue that we do not need stiffer penalties in our criminal justice system. We already have strong penalties; our prisons are full!

More disturbing is the evidence that those who commit hate crimes are disproportionately juveniles—a category of persons for whom we generally seek lesser penalties. In New York City between 1981 and 1990, 70 percent of individuals arrested for hate crimes were under the age of nineteen (*New York Times*, June 29, 1990). The National Church Arson Task Force reported in 1997 that at least 42 percent of those arrested for church arsons were juveniles.

† **WEAKENING OF FREE SPEECH.** It is very difficult to defend someone's right to speak or believe repugnant prejudices. But almost always the determination that an act is a hate crime hinges on the perpetrator's speech—his verbal abuse of the victims, his possession of offensive literature, his membership in hate groups. Thus hate crime laws impinge on what would be constitutionally protected speech if the crime were not attached. We must not sit idly by while people spout bigotry and hatred. But the antidote to wrong speech is right speech, not legal sanction. We have an obligation to defend the right to hold and express unpopular views.

† **FOSTERING IDENTITY POLITICS.** My most serious objection to hate crime laws, however, is that they encourage identity politics. In identity politics, individuals relate to one another as members of competing groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, or religion.

According to the logic of identity politics, it is strategically advantageous to be recognized as disadvantaged and victimized. Advocacy groups thus have a vested interest in portraying their particular group as a special victim in society. No group is immune to this temptation, from the Catholic League to homosexual advocacy groups, from the Anti-Defamation League to the NAACP. Identity politics discourages pride and confidence. It hardens resentments and contributes to the balkanization of America.

There is a particular danger when a group aspiring to victim status attempts to portray society in the worst possible light. For example, in 1996-97 the National Council of Churches cried wolf about an alleged epidemic of racially-motivated church burnings—an

allegation for which, in the end, there was no evidence. The NCC thus damaged more than its own reputation. It also fostered a debilitating climate of fear and mistrust within a community that needed confidence, hope, and a sense of belonging. And even when there is real crime rooted in prejudice, it may still be mistaken to assume that the pathologies of a few violent criminals somehow reveal the true attitudes of the rest of society.

The identity politics that seems strongest in the current drive for hate crime legislation is homosexual advocacy. Although cases of racially-motivated violence are also cited, there is no evidence that these are a more acute problem today. Racial minorities stood in far more need of protection from lynchings and the like several decades ago. As an African American friend of mine asked, "Why the big push now? Where has everyone been?"

By contrast, homosexual advocates do have a current political imperative. They see hate crime legislation as another opportunity to write the dubious category of "sexual orientation" into law. Thus homosexuals would become a specially protected group, with the state committed to their cause. Conversely, any who objected to homosexuality would be branded as potential criminal suspects.

What should the church do?

† **SUPPORT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS** such as those related to Prison Fellowship—programs which aim at requiring criminals to make restoration to the victims of their crimes. These have potential to bring true healing to the social scars inflicted by hate crimes.

† **ENGAGE IN ACTS OF SOLIDARITY.** Suppose a Jewish cemetery is desecrated in your town by a bunch of young thugs. There is no question that this is an ugly crime that has deep social ramifications. But how much social healing will take place if, when the case comes to trial months later, the vandals are given an extra year in prison? What if, instead, all the churches in your town showed up the next day and pitched in to repair the damage? What if friendships were developed and the local rabbi were invited to visit with your youth group? Wouldn't that be a better antidote to hate?

† **MINISTER GOD'S LOVE TO HOMOSEXUALS AND OTHERS WHO FEEL REJECTED AND EXCLUDED.** There is no question that the church must combat hate. But don't we as Christians have resources against hate that are more powerful than any legislation? We have love—indeed, we worship and obey the God who is love. As we have been welcomed by God, so we must welcome homosexuals and all others into our sanctuaries and our homes. And we must tell them the Gospel of Christ, by which we have been transformed and by which they too may be transformed. We must walk together with them in costly, caring discipleship. The only antidote to hate is, finally, love—the love of God. 

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

SERB CHURCH BACKS
MILOSEVIC OUSTER

The Serbian Orthodox Church added its voice to the other pressures that finally induced Yugoslav strongman



Newly-elected Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica addresses his followers from the balcony of Belgrade City Hall.

Slobodan Milosevic to leave power. After the September 24 election, the Holy Synod of Serbian Orthodox bishops recognized opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica as the "elected president."

At a time when Milosevic was vacillating in response to his election defeat, the church urged a peaceful transition of power. Patriarch Pavle asked the Yugoslav military and police "to do their utmost so that government could change in a peaceful, dignified and civilized manner, thus preserving their reputation before the people and the whole world."

Orthodox priests were notable among the crowds of opposition demonstrators that took over Belgrade on October 5. Church leaders had previously criticized Milosevic for his human rights abuses that had isolated the nation internationally. But they had also denounced the 1999 NATO military intervention in Kosovo.

FRENCH BILL WOULD
PUNISH 'PROSELYTIZERS'
FOR 'DANGEROUS SECTS'

A proposal approved by the French National Assembly in June threatens prison terms of up to two years for religious "proselytizers." They could be charged with the crime of "mental manipulation," which is defined as "exercising serious and repeated pressure on a person in order to create or exploit a state of dependence."

The bill is intended to stop the growth of "dangerous sects" in France. A government office called the Interministerial Mission to Battle Against Sects maintains a list of 173 such sects, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and Baptists. Under the new proposal, any of these could be outlawed after two of their representatives have been convicted of at least one incident of illegal "proselytizing."

Before the bill becomes law, it would have to be first reconciled with a milder version passed by the French Senate and then signed by President Jacques Chirac. French Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou praised the measure as "a significant advance giving a democratic state the legal tool to efficiently fight groups abusing its core values." She conceded, however, that the bill might conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights. Both Catholic and Protestant church officials have criticized the proposal as an infringement of religious liberty.

WCC THINKERS RAIL AGAINST
'GLOBAL CAPITALISM'

A June colloquium co-sponsored by the World Council of Churches rang with denunciations of "global capitalism" and calls for an unspecified "alternative." Former WCC general secretary

Philip Potter urged churches to break their "theological silence" and speak out against the "unjust structures of global capitalism." Julio de Santa Ana, a professor at the WCC's Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, charged that "capitalism cannot be exercised without cultural and military domination." Capitalism aims at "subordinating all other interests" to "mainly bourgeois Western powers," de Santa Ana told the meeting in Hofgeismar, Germany.

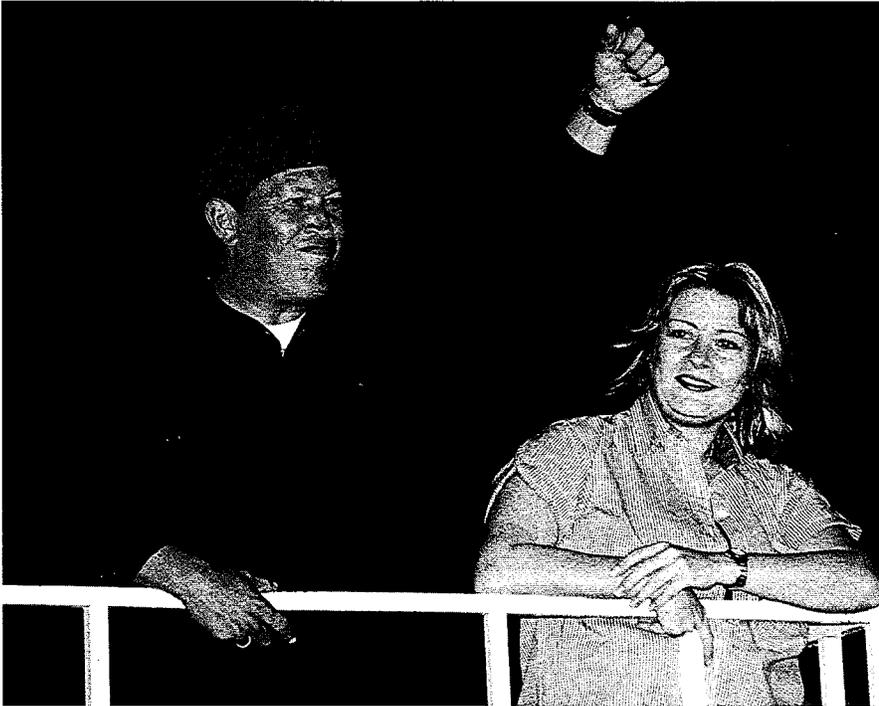
Potter lamented "a feeling of hopelessness" in the churches, remarking that the collapse of the Soviet system had "left people wondering what to do." But he took comfort in reiterating the old, unfulfilled Marxist prophecy of a cataclysmic "crisis of capitalism." Potter predicted, "The dangers of a global economic collapse are very real." Likewise, de Santa Ana warned: "We are on the eve of the explosion of a big crisis. Capital, and financial capital especially, is highly irresponsible, but it will be responsible for the crisis."

One of the WCC's meeting organizers, Ulrich Duchrow, told Ecumenical News International: "It's encouraging to see that the attention of churches and faith communities is finally being drawn to the totalitarian dimensions of capital globalization, which can be compared to Nazism in its absolutist pretensions."

VENEZUELAN LEADER
TURNS TO ANTI-CLERICALISM

In recent campaigns for a new constitution and his own re-election, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez launched harsh attacks on the nation's Catholic bishops. He called church leaders who had opposed him "degenerate priests." In a Sunday broadcast, Chavez named three bishops who "need to be exorcised."

Chavez is a former paratrooper who gained fame in an unsuccessful 1992 coup attempt. He eventually won the presidency in a 1998 election, appealing to popular revulsion at the corruption of Venezuela's traditional political elites. Chavez favors leftist rhetoric about "social revolution," and he is a professed admirer of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro.



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, with wife Marisabel, celebrates his election to a new six-year term. Chavez now has the concentrated power against which the Venezuelan Catholic bishops had warned.

But the only consistent trend of his presidency so far has been the accumulation of power in his own hands.

The Venezuelan Bishops' Conference has criticized that trend. "His [Chavez's] aim is to cause the other components of society to disappear," explained Monsignor Baltzar Porras, head of the conference, "so that, with nothing between the government and the masses, there's no need for a dialogue. That's dangerous and damaging for any society."

In May Chavez released a rambling 20-page open letter to the bishops. He compared himself to Christ and his clerical critics to the Pharisees. Adducing an odd collection of quotations from the Bible, Pope Paul VI, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Simon Bolivar, the Venezuelan president asserted that "God is with the revolution." Those who oppose the revolution are "with the devil," according to Chavez. He warned the bishops darkly: "If we allow the peaceful path of the revolution to be blocked, nobody will be able to stop it being achieved through the paths of violence."

PAKISTANI CHRISTIANS DISAPPOINTED IN MILITARY RULER

Pakistani Christian leaders were optimistic when General Pervez Musharraf seized power in October 1999. But a year later they were discouraged by his failure to ease the legal burdens upon Pakistan's religious minorities. On September 3 churches in Pakistan observed a special day of prayer "for courage to fight religious apartheid peacefully and non-violently."

Christian leaders had hoped that the more secular-oriented Musharraf would be friendlier than the Islamist government of Nawaz Sharif, whom the general had ousted in a military coup. On April 21 Musharraf announced his intention of softening the "blasphemy law," under which non-Muslims have been jailed for alleged insults to Islam. He had also promised to end the "separate electoral system," under which religious minorities may vote only for a few token legislative seats that have been set aside for members of their groups.

But on May 16, under pressure from

Islamist groups, the Pakistani ruler backed down on the blasphemy law. "As it was the unanimous demand of the Ulema [Muslim clerics] and the people, therefore, I have decided to do away with the procedural change in ... the blasphemy law," Musahrraf announced. "No one can even think of changing it [the blasphemy law]," he added. Then on August 14 the general unveiled a new electoral code that retained the principle of separate seats for religious minorities.

These decisions were sharp setbacks for Pakistan's 3 million Christians. Victor Azariahs, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Pakistan, explained to Ecumenical News International: "Christians have been marginalized. We are treated as second-class citizens with no right to join political parties or to talk about national issues or share power."

'JIHAD' FIGHTERS SHARPEN INDONESIAN CONFLICT

With the arrival of at least 2,000 "jihad" fighters from other parts of Indonesia, the religious conflict in the Maluku Islands took a turn for the worse. The self-styled "Jihad Command" began landing its militiamen in late May, as reinforcements to local Muslims caught up in clashes with their Christian neighbors.

On July 8 the Communion of Churches of Indonesia issued an urgent appeal. All attempts at local mediation had been frustrated by the entry of the Jihad Command, according to the church body. "The situation continues to deteriorate," the Communion of Churches declared, threatening "the existence of the Christian community in Maluku and ... the process of reformation [under the nation's new democratic government] and the existence of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia." The Indonesian churches asked the government to discipline army and police units that had sided with the Muslims. They also called for United Nations monitoring of the situation of Maluku.

Since the religious violence erupted in Maluku in January 1999, over 4,000 lives have been lost, more than 700 churches have been destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of people have been driven from their homes. Several international relief groups have withdrawn from the islands because of the unsafe conditions. f

The Next Generation

FROM THE EYES OF A FIRST-TIME DELEGATE

by David Sheaffer

Walking into the convention center at Valley Forge, PA, was yet another eye-opening experience in the life of this young United Methodist. I grew up in a United Methodist Church where the Gospel was preached, not realizing that my fortunate situation wasn't universal within the denomination. Having awakened to this reality, I was now—as a member of Jarrettown United Methodist Church in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference—going to defend the Gospel at our annual conference.

I was surprised by the sermon of Bishop Peter Weaver, who encouraged us to open our eyes to the fact that people will stand in line weeks for a Star Wars movie, yet no one is waiting at the doors of our churches. The reason? While good battles evil in Star Wars, our churches fail to proclaim that the Good Shepherd, in his death and resurrection, overcame the evil of this world for our personal salvation. A heartening reminder that the Gospel still flickers amongst some within the leadership of our denomination.

Then the business began. I felt as if I were at a political action convention more than a church conference. We denounced everything. Welfare reform, capital punishment, lack of state spending on public

education, and terminator seed technology. In regards to the last one, I have determined the conference took a stronger stance on defending the rights of a farmer's seed than on the life of an unborn child.

One blessing is that we are the only conference in the United Methodist Church that does not impose mandatory apportionments that each local church must send to the higher levels of the denomination. We modified this rule, but basically kept it at askings rather than apportionments. Each congregation decides for itself what funds it will send to the conference. I hope that we are the prototype for many other conferences.

Late on the third day of the conference we finally got to an issue that I had been anticipating. Having bitten my lip through the other debates, I decided if I was ever going to take a stand it would be where I knew I was backed by God's Word. The question was whether the conference would pray for and call individuals out of homosexual lifestyles and prohibit our pastors from performing same-sex unions. Sadly, there had been more unity on the clearly political issues than on this theological issue.

One pastor referred to "this movement"

as a faction forcing its will on the church as a whole. Ironically, he was not speaking about the homosexual contingent, but the individuals who were defending 2000 years of orthodox Christian doctrine. That inspired a response on my behalf defending the orthodox view. It must have been somewhat impassioned, because it produced the only applause that came out of three days of meetings. Fortunately, when it came to a vote a solid majority favored the orthodox Christian doctrine.

Annual conference was not fun. It was not the way I would normally choose to spend two precious vacation days. But it was necessary, and I will be back. I am still learning that the United Methodist Church doesn't just stop at the doors of my congregation. The church needs more members who will proclaim the Gospel in their daily lives, and also defend it at their annual conferences. If your voice isn't heard, make sure you know who is speaking on your behalf. **f**

David Sheaffer is Communications Coordinator at World Harvest Mission, which sponsors church planting and church renewal in 12 foreign countries and the United States.



THE INSTITUTE
ON RELIGION & DEMOCRACY
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Suite 1180
Washington, DC 20005

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