

FAITH & FREEDOM

REFORMING THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL WITNESS

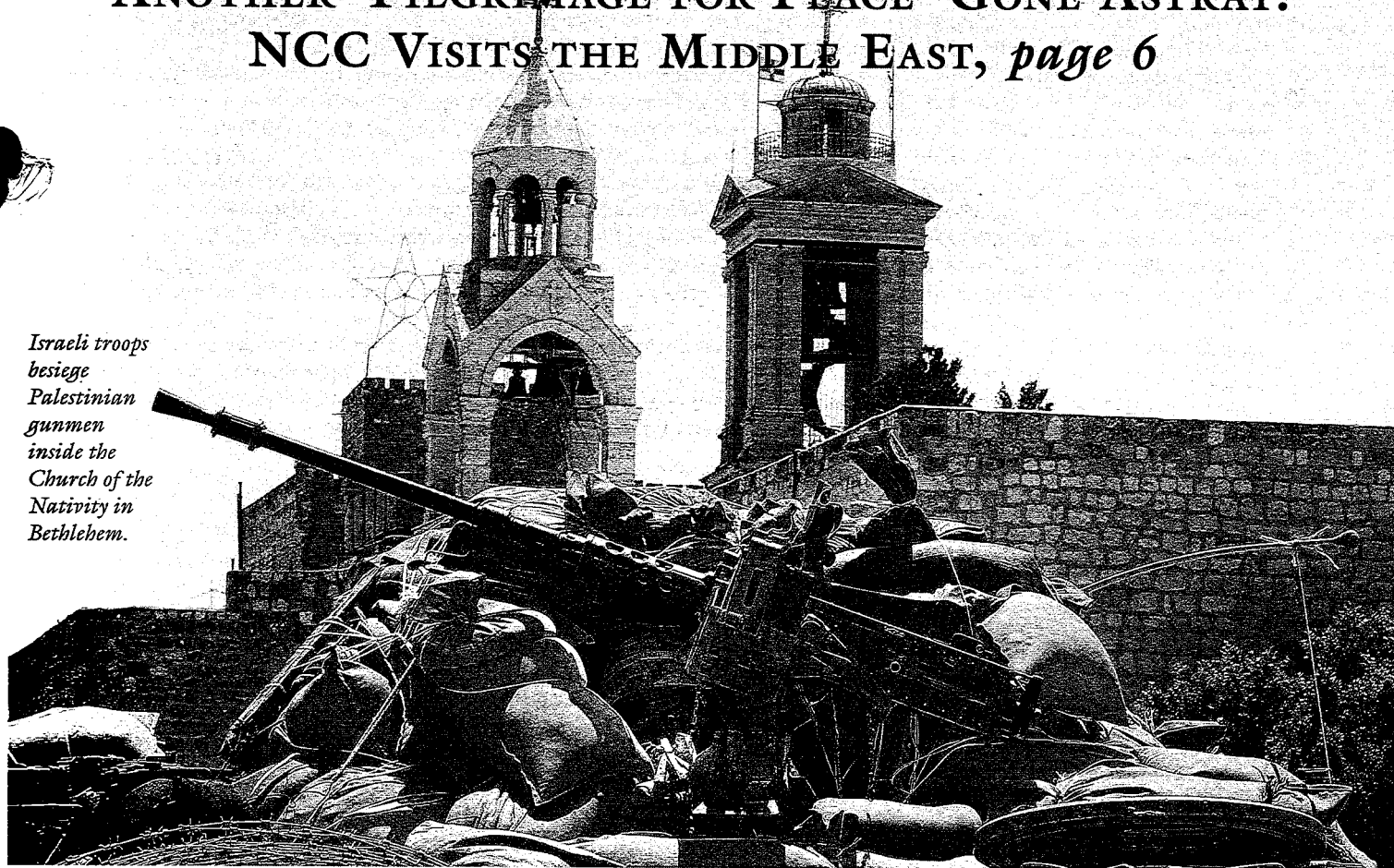
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*Israeli troops
besiege
Palestinian
gunmen
inside the
Church of the
Nativity in
Bethlehem.*



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

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

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

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LETTERS

KUDOS TO IRD FOR "STRAIGHT ANSWERS [TO MORAL CONFUSION IN NATIONAL CRISIS]" regarding responses from adjudicators from the old line and elsewhere after September 11. Alan Wisdom has brought wisdom (pardon the pun) and sanity to legions of loyal Christian lay people who are mystified and confused, if not angry, over the bad theology and ethics of church leaders.

Since I have been busy recently lecturing on Augustine's "just war" theory, I would like to point out one suggestion. Wisdom states that Christian teaching on "just war" rests on a "presumption against violence," because one "should not take up arms lightly." As George Weigel argues, "just war" thinking starts with a "presumption for justice," not a "presumption against violence." Normative Christian theologians knew violence was endemic to the human condition and that violence was necessary for achieving legitimate public ends. Weigel rightly argues that giving first priority to a "presumption against violence" scenario plays into the pacifist argument.

Walter Benjamin, Professor Emeritus,
Hamline University, St. Paul, MN

The following letter responds to "Twenty-One Theses for Christian Engagement in the Middle East" as it appeared on IRD's website, www.ird-renew.org. A shorter version of the theses appears on page 10 of this issue.

GREAT WORK ON THE 21 ARTICLES OF BELIEF ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST. WHILE I HAVE SOME minor disagreements, the statement in whole is the best Christian position I have yet read on the issue.

I am sort of a political "mongrel" who can't be put into a simple pigeonhole. While I support the rights of gay Christians and am generally politically liberal, I can recite the Creed in all sincerity, without winking and nodding. I am appalled by the revisionist theology of fellow Episcopalian, Bishop Spong.

Most especially, I find myself increasingly at odds with the Episcopal Church on the Middle East. While the basic Church principles of statehood for the Palestinians and secure and peaceful borders for Israel are fine as far as they go, I am disturbed by the consistent "slant" of official Episcopalians toward the Palestinians; I sometimes question the sincerity of their believing even in Israel's right to exist, let alone to have secure borders.

Recently, my parish, which prides itself on being progressive, had a forum on the Middle East, and I was the only supporter of Israel out of about 20 participants. It is refreshing to see a website that defends Israel in principle, without necessarily defending everything Israel does (all have sinned, and that includes Israel and every other nation

Earl H. Foote (via e-mail)

**TWO IMPORTANT CONFERENCES WILL TAKE PLACE
THE WEEKEND OF OCTOBER 24-26.**

■ The Association for Church Renewal is sponsoring "Confessing the Faith: Reclaiming Historic Faith and Teaching for the 21st Century" in Indianapolis. Speakers include IRD's Diane Knippers and Thomas Oden.

Conference on Christian Sexuality," featuring keynote speaker Robert A. J. Gagnon.

■ The same weekend in Kansas City, the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau will host the "ALPB

Information on both events can be found on the Association for Church Renewal's website, www.ird-renew.org/acr. Please make plans now to attend one of these vital conversations.

PHOTO CREDITS

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

By Diane L. Knippers



Quite naturally, since last September 11 there has been a burgeoning interest in Islam. American Christians seem to view Islam through two contrasting lenses. Some conservatives argue that Islam is a thoroughly evil and corrupt religion—not only wrong about God, but so oppressive of humans that there can be little place for Muslim influence in a free society.

Many liberal Christians, on the other hand, seem to see an idealized Islam. Muslims are children of Abraham, just like us, they say. If we would simply understand them, we would find nothing to fear.

It's easiest to refute this latter group. The worldwide evidence linking contemporary Islam and oppression is incontrovertible. The most recent Freedom House survey shows that 85 out of 145 non-Muslim nations (over half) are classified as fully "free." But out of 47 predominantly Muslim nations, only one can be called "free." Eighteen are "partly free" and 28 are "not free." From Indonesia to Iran, from Saudi Arabia to Sudan, regimes and movements claiming Islamic inspiration practice the most brutal human rights abuses. Simply to say that Islam is an innocuous religion of peace is willful ignorance.

But must Islam be therefore dismissed as *always* incompatible with democracy, justice, and human freedom? Let me be clear that I see the deep theological conflict between Christianity and Islam. According to the Koran, Jesus never died on the cross and therefore was not truly resurrected. This teaching cuts the heart out of the Gospel that is our only eternal hope.

Nevertheless, I would not restrict the temporal hopes for democracy, freedom, and human rights only to Christians. I believe that these are universal human aspirations, compatible with our created human nature. Obviously, some religions and cultures are more compatible with democracy than others. So what are the prospects related to Islam?

Answering this question requires a closer examination of the differences within Islam, which has factions


much as Christianity does. Some are relatively moderate and tolerant, although virtually all look toward a social order in which non-Muslims are second-class citizens. The more extreme factions leave no place at all for non-Muslims.

Sorting out these differences was the task addressed by a July 10 conference sponsored by Freedom House on "Prospects for Human Rights and Democracy under Extreme Sharia." The conference pointed to the growth of Wahhabism as the locus of the problem we face. Much of the contemporary Islamic extremism is rooted in this movement that developed in the 18th and 19th centuries in the eastern Arabian Peninsula. The source of this new stream of thought was a Muslim scholar named Muhammad ibn Abd-al Wahhab. Wahhabism seeks to impose the most literal and extreme form of *sharia*—what Muslims believe is divinely revealed law.

The prime sponsor of Wahhabism today is Saudi Arabia. The Saudi dynasty won its power over the Arabian peninsula in the early 20th century in an alliance with Wahhabi clerics. Fueled by Saudi oil wealth, Wahhabism has now been catapulted into a global movement. Some observers note that today there are actually two competing forms of globalization—Western and Saudi.

Saudi Arabia is consistently rated the most severe persecutor of Christians on earth. By law, a Saudi citizen must be Muslim. Leaving Islam is considered apostasy, a capital offense. Expatriate workers (from Filipino laborers to U.S. oil executives) find their religious expression severely restricted. Non-Muslim public worship is banned and even small private "house church" meetings are raided by the religious police.

Here's the nasty secret about U.S. foreign and economic policy. Our men and women in uniform are defending—and our huge oil industry is supporting—a regime that exports a virulent, rapidly expanding, anti-democratic ideology. This movement preys on the fears of the poor and oppressed, but offers them only greater injustice.

Americans, including American Christians, embrace religious freedom. We support freedoms of association, speech, and conscience. Can we live with—tolerate—Islam at its best? Yes, I hope we can. Can we live with Islam at its worst? No, we cannot. We had better learn to tell the difference. And we had better develop a foreign policy that reflects that difference. 

CHURCH NEWS

NCC HEAD BLASTS
BUSH ON CUBA

National Council of Churches (NCC) General Secretary Bob Edgar lashed out against Bush administration policy on Cuba. In a speech to the Washington Office on Latin America on May 20, Edgar charged, "In many ways, this president is blind and continues to encourage blindness in others."

Edgar denounced the longstanding U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba. "If we really want to invade Cuba with democracy, the best way is to lift the embargo," Edgar stated. Bush has said that the sanctions will remain in place until President Fidel Castro takes steps toward democratic reform.

The NCC general secretary did not seem to think that great reforms were needed in Cuba. He painted a positive picture of life in Cuba, except for economic difficulties that he attributed to the U.S. sanctions. He asserted that religious freedom is "flourishing" on the island.

Edgar implied that President Bush's hard line on Cuba was an unprincipled political ploy. He said that Bush was merely trying to shore up support from Cuban exiles in Florida, where the President's brother Jeb Bush is running for re-election as governor.

"I think God not only wants us to recognize our enemies but recognize our enemies when our enemies are doing the right thing," the NCC leader insisted. The council has a long record of proclaiming that Castro is "doing the right thing" in Cuba.

'CULTURE OF LIFE'
STATEMENT RELEASED

In an effort aimed at convincing Americans of the sacredness of life, more than 100 religious leaders, scholars, and activists recently joined in signing the 3,700 word document, "Building a Culture of Life: A Call to Respect Human Dignity in American Life."

The statement was signed by a religiously diverse group including Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, Jews, and Roman

Catholics. The signers called for a 50 percent reduction in abortions by the year 2005. They sought "a country that respects the inherent worth of every human being: every man and woman, each parent and child, all who are elderly or disabled, healthy or ill—everyone, be they successful or struggling."

The document pointed to the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* as the catalyst for the change in the way "life" is treated in America. It warned, "What began with the destruction of the child conceived but not yet born now extends to those being born, to those who are newly born, and even to those who are medically or psychologically frail."

The statement was released on April 17 by the Family Research Council. Signers included Charles Colson, Rabbi Daniel Lapin, James Dobson, and Archbishop Herman of the Orthodox Church in America.

STUDY BLAMES 'RELIGIOUS RIGHT'
FOR RISE IN UNCHURCHED

A study published in the April issue of *American Sociological Review* analyzed a striking trend: The proportion of Americans reporting "no religious preference" doubled from 7 to 14 percent over the course of the 1990s. The main explanation, according to

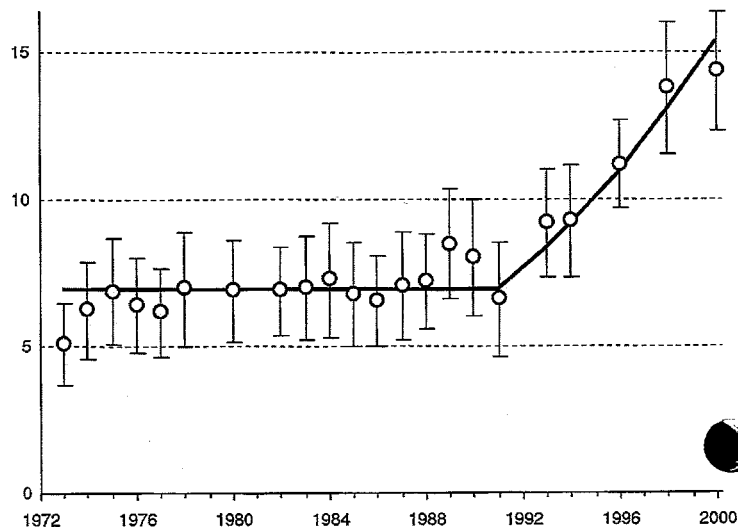
sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fischer of the University of California, Berkeley: "Our conjecture is that the growing connection made in the press and in Congress between Republicans and Christian evangelicals may have led Americans with moderate and liberal political views to express their distance from the Religious Right by saying they prefer no religion."

Hout and Fischer rejected the hypothesis that the decline in religious preference might be related to a decline in religious belief. "Survey data," they say, "offer no evidence that Americans lost faith in the 1990s, or even raised new doubts." They noted that many of the newly unchurched call themselves "spiritual" and say they believe in God. "At most one-third of the people who prefer no religion are atheists or agnostics, and that fraction decreased slightly in the 1990s," the two sociologists remarked.

Hout and Fischer attributed some of the rise in "no religious preference" to young adults who extend their schooling and delay marriage and childbearing. These trends reduce the numbers of young parents returning to earlier religious attachments. But the Berkeley sociologists insisted that politics had more influence over the sudden doubling of the unchurched.

Curiously, the two never considered the fact that almost all the steep church

Percentage with
no religious
preference, by
year: persons 25
to 74 years old.
(*General Social
Survey.*)



membership losses have occurred within the oldline Protestant churches. The divisive political messages emanating from those denominations have nothing to do with the Religious Right. They come from the Religious Left—a force unmentioned by Hout and Fischer.

RELIGIOUS VOICES DISAGREE OVER LOOSENING IRS RESTRICTIONS

Two bills have been introduced in the House of Representatives that would allow more room for religious bodies to endorse political candidates and legislation, without endangering their tax-exempt status. Reactions from those bodies have been mixed.

The bills, authored by Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC) and Rep. Phil Crane (R-IL), have been backed by conservative groups such as the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council. They argue, with Rep. Jones, that “the appropriate level, if any of political speech should be decided by the church and its parishioners, not the Internal Revenue Service.”

But oldline Protestant lobbyists have spoken against the legislation. They warn that it would bring a new level of political partisanship into America’s houses of worship. “The church must speak to worldly issues from the deep places of faith, but must not lend the voice of faith to temporal interests,” insisted Brenda Girton-Mitchell of the National Council of Churches. It is ironic to hear such a warning from an organization that has so often leaped to join itself to the “temporal interests” of the political left.

PRESBYTERIAN OFFICIAL REJECTS BUSH MARRIAGE PLAN

Elenora Giddings Ivory, director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) lobbying office in Washington, criticized President Bush’s proposal to spend \$300 million for voluntary marriage counseling programs for welfare recipients. She asked, “Can the government demand that a couple be married in order to gain public financial support?”



*Presbyterian
Washington Office
director Elenora Ivory
suggested that God did
not “promote marriage
in every situation” in
the Bible. She said God
favored “varying forms
of the family for varying
purposes.”*

Ivory spoke to a May 7 conference on “Religion, the Marriage Movement & Marriage Policy.” She supported her position with a peculiar interpretation of two biblical stories. She questioned: “Was God promoting marriage in every situation? We see that Mary, mother of Jesus, did not marry Joseph before the pregnancy happened, before the Christ child was conceived. There was a purpose and an ultimate outcome to that particular situation that led to 2,000 years of the Christian faith.”

Turning to the Old Testament, Ivory recounted how “Abraham fathered children by both his 90-year-old wife, Sarah, and her slave girl, Hagar. This appears to have been God’s plan.” She urged her audience to understand that “God’s ideal may be to foster varying forms of the family for varying purposes.”

The Presbyterian official cited a 1980 church paper that affirmed, “Mutually enriching encounters, which were not exploitative or manipulative and evoked a measure of enduring care, have occurred between persons who are not in conventional relationships or permanent committed fidelity.” Ivory did not mention her denomination’s moral standard requiring either fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness.

Wade Horn, an assistant secretary of Health and Human Services, defended the Bush proposals. He refuted Ivory’s misconception, clarifying that the administration’s aim is “to help couples who choose marriage for themselves develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages.”

TWO TOP CLERICS REJECT WAR WITH IRAQ

As reports circulated about Bush Administration plans for ousting Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, two top U.S. Protestant officials registered their objections. General Secretary Robert Edgar of the National Council of Churches and President John Thomas of the United Church of Christ (UCC), in separate interviews with Ecumenical News International, warned that any military action against Iraq would be counter-productive.

Edgar derided the “World War II idea that you can drop bombs on terrorists.” He claimed that “taking that kind of blunt military action” against Saddam “would not be a healthy move.” Edgar reported that, during the NCC’s April trip to the Middle East (see p. 6), Arab leaders told him that they would oppose any U.S. invasion of Iraq. While they had “no love for Hussein, they respect the Iraqi people,” the NCC executive said.

Thomas declared that he would be “alarmed and dismayed” if U.S. forces moved against Iraq. He predicted a catastrophic loss of civilian life and a “hardening of divisions” in the Middle East. Thomas referred to a statement jointly adopted in April by four national UCC agencies. The statement charged that “U.S. military action against Saddam Hussein, and the imposition of strict economic sanctions against Iraq, have only strengthened his tyrannical regime while bringing untold misery to the Iraqi people.”

NCC VISITS THE MIDDLE EAST ANOTHER 'PILGRIMAGE FOR PEACE' GONE ASTRAY

By Erik Nelson and Mark Tooley

The U.S. National Council of Churches has developed a method of responding to conflicts in other parts of the world. It makes a "pilgrimage for peace." So as Palestinian terrorist attacks and Israeli military reprisals escalated this spring, NCC leaders directed their pilgrim feet (and jet planes) toward the Middle East.

The results this time were no more encouraging than those of past NCC pilgrimages—to places such as the former Soviet Union, Nicaragua and El Salvador, North Korea, Cuba, Iraq, and Serbia. Peace has not arrived. Nobody in the region changed policies after hearing the NCC's advice. Perhaps so little attention was paid because the advice dispensed on such pilgrimages is so predictable: The United States and its allies are primarily to blame in every conflict. America's adversaries have been sorely misunderstood. Peace will come when everyone obeys United Nations resolutions and accepts UN peacekeepers.

The delegation of 13 U.S. church leaders visited the region April 16-27 at the invitation of the Middle East Council of Churches. They called their trip a "fact-finding mission" and "a pilgrimage for peace." The group included officials of a number of mainline denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Church USA.

The vast majority of the NCC delegation's time was spent with local Christian and Muslim leaders. The delegation met with three Arab heads of state. But it scheduled no meetings with the Israeli government until the penultimate day of its visit. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declined the honor of receiving a group that had probably already made up its mind. He left it to lower-level bureaucrats to entertain the U.S. church visitors. The NCC leaders had even less interaction with Israeli Jews from outside the government.

BY WHOSE SPIRIT?

Upon their return to the United States, the delegation issued a statement entitled "By My Spirit: What Will Make for Peace in the Middle East?" The statement followed the skewed moral logic of virtually all recent oldline U.S. church commentary on the Middle East (see p. 8). At times it implied a moral equivalence between Israel's democratic government and the Palestinian Authority. One passage insisted: "We call upon

Israel and the Palestinian Authority to agree to an immediate ceasefire, to end all attacks upon civilians and civilian institutions, and to exercise the highest degree of restraint in responding to violations of the ceasefire. We condemn equally and unequivocally both the suicide bombings and Palestinian violence against Israeli society *and* the violence of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories."

No moral distinction was drawn between the terrorist suicide bombings and the Israeli military strikes aimed at terrorists and their sponsors. Indeed, the words "terrorism" and "terrorist" did not appear in the NCC statement. All "acts of violence" were deplored equally.

But when they dealt in specifics, the NCC pilgrims abandoned any pretense of moral equivalence. They fired a harsh barrage of complaints against Israeli government policies. They denounced "the devastation caused by the Israeli Defense Forces" and "the intense onslaught against Palestinian refugee camps." They sympathized with the Palestinian "feeling of broken promises and shattered hope" and lamented the "desperation and hopelessness that has led Palestinian young people to be willing to kill themselves and Israeli citizens."

The NCC group delivered no similar condemnations of actions by the Palestinian Authority and other Arab governments. Those governments were not specifically blamed for the suicide bombings, which were attributed merely to "Palestinians." Evidence suggesting that Arab governments had incited and equipped the suicide bombers, and remunerated their families, was ignored.

Echoing Palestinian demands, the NCC delegation listed "critical components of a just resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." These included "the end of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza"; "the cessation of the building of new Israeli settlements"; the "abandonment, dismantling, or other disposition of settlements that negate the geographic integrity of a viable Palestinian state"; "the sharing of Jerusalem" (with Israel renouncing its claims of sovereignty); and "the commitment by Israel to address the issue of the right of return for Palestinian refugees" whose ancestors lived in what is now Israel.

The only concession that the NCC pilgrims would require of the Arab governments was "the affirmation by Palestinians and by Arab states of the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure borders." They did

not note a major difficulty: the fact that many Palestinian and Arab leaders have repeatedly spoken of their intent to destroy Israel, and that those leaders have acted on that intent in four wars against the Jewish state.

FAWNING OVER A DICTATOR

Press reports on the NCC trip featured many dubious claims made by Arab spokesmen who met with the delegation. Muslim Sheikh Abdul Azzim Salhab told his American visitors that Israel has no valid historical claim to the area around the Al Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock shrine in Jerusalem. "Throughout all of the excavations they have performed, the Jews have not found any clue or link to their existence in the area," claimed the official of the Islamic Wakf that controls the mosque and shrine. Mainstream archaeologists recognize the site as the location of the ancient Jewish temple.

Adnan Husseini, another Islamic Wakf official, declared: "The Israelis have failed to rule Jerusalem. Jerusalem can never be under Israeli sovereignty because there is no place for Christians and no place for Muslims." There was no indication in the NCC press



Amnesty International reports that "torture and ill-treatment continue to be inflicted routinely" on political prisoners held by Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. But NCC officials lauded Assad as a "polished head of state" who has "really related to the daily life of the people."

releases or other press reports that any of the NCC pilgrims attempted to rebut these charges.

During the NCC's interview with him, the prime minister of Lebanon fingered Israel as the aggressor. "He committed a crime against humanity," Rafiq Hariri said of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's military actions on the West Bank. Again, there was apparently no dissent from the NCC pilgrims.

The NCC had a cordial meeting with Syria dictator Bashar al-Assad, whom one Orthodox NCC official praised as a "well-informed, mature, polished head of state" who has "really related to the daily life of the people." Assad, who refused to recognize or negotiate with Israel, told the U.S. church delegation: "Through all these years and wars and massacres, the Arabs generally, and the Palestinians particularly, were searching for hope.... [Now] the only hope [Palestinians] can have is that the United States will impose a solution consistent with the UN resolutions." Assad was vexed that U.S. policy had been preoccupied with fighting terrorism.

NCC general secretary Bob Edgar afterwards called Assad "articulate, clear and thoughtful." He gave insights and a sense that Christians and Muslims and Jews can live together." Edgar and his colleagues made no public response to Assad's remarks last year (in the presence of Pope John Paul II) blaming Jews for the "murder and torture" of Jesus Christ and for attempting to kill the prophet Mohammed. Nor did they publicly mention the reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other sources detailing the severe limitations on religious freedom and other civil liberties in Syria and other Arab states.

The NCC group expressed deep concern for the survival of Christian communities in Israel and the Israeli-occupied West Bank. But its statements said nothing about the tribulations of Christian minorities elsewhere in the Middle East. If the delegation challenged any of the Arab leaders about human rights abuses, it is not recorded in the NCC's own reports. By contrast, the peace pilgrims told freely of their "lively" disputes with Israeli officials. Clearly, they identified Israel as the main culprit in need of correction.

On the other hand, the NCC treated the Palestinian Authority as the oppressed party in need of "solidarity" and advocacy. The assumption seemed to be that the Palestinians are isolated and lacking friends. Yet strangely enough, it is not the Palestinians but the Israelis that have become isolated in the current crisis. Palestinians enjoy economic and political support from the European Union and the United States, as well as military support from Iran and Saudi Arabia. The United Nations has passed dozens of resolutions condemning Israel and championing the Palestinians. Israel has no significant ally except the United States. So is the NCC's support for the Palestinians really solidarity with the oppressed, or is it just floating with the same ideological currents that carry along other leftist, anti-western organizations?

A STEADY SLANT: EXCERPTS FROM RECENT OLDLINE CHURCH STATEMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST

U.S. ECUMENICAL

“Delegation members also participated in ecumenical food and medicine aid convoys to Jenin, Bethlehem, and Beit Jala where we personally witnessed the devastation caused by the Israeli Defense Forces. We were alarmed to find that the damage extends beyond fighting carried out against Palestinian resistance forces to include intentional destruction of Palestinian civil society. The impact of the Israeli invasion and destruction of Palestinian infrastructure has exacerbated the feeling of broken promises and shattered hopes....

“We condemn equally and unequivocally both the suicide bombings and Palestinian violence against Israeli society and the violence of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. All are counterproductive to achieving peace with justice. Repeatedly, we were asked to understand the context of desperation and hopelessness that has led Palestinian young people to be willing to kill themselves and Israeli citizens. Similarly, we were asked to understand the depth of fear among the Israeli public that has led to an intense onslaught against Palestinian refugee camps, towns, and cities.

- Both societies are caught in a cycle of violence and revenge.

“The delegation finds that the following are critical components of a just resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

- an end to the cycle of violence;
- the affirmation by Palestinians and by Arab states of the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure borders;
- the establishment of an international peacekeeping force, agreed upon by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, to oversee the Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza and maintain order until a peace agreement can be fully implemented;
- the end of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza;

- the cessation of the building of new Israeli settlements and of the expansion of existing settlements in the West Bank and Gaza;
- abandonment, dismantling, or other disposition of settlements that negate the geographic integrity of a viable Palestinian state, under the terms of a negotiated peace agreement;
- the sharing of Jerusalem by the two peoples and three faiths so that Jerusalem may truly reflect its name, City of Peace; and
- the commitment by Israel to address the issue of the right of return for Palestinian refugees....

“Our delegation leaves the Middle East convinced that an enduring peace can be achieved if the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories ends and if the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside a secure State of Israel follows soon....”

~Concluding statement by National Council of Churches delegation to Middle East, “By My Spirit: What Will Make for Peace in the Middle East?” April 30, 2002.

Commentary on this statement appears in the article on page six.

“You can’t blame a people whose humanity has been denied from rising up and demanding their rights... If one people fail to recognize the humanity of another, you cannot blame them when you suffer. Deal with the reality of what created the crisis.”

~The Rev. John McCullough of the NCC’s Church World Service, quoted by Episcopal News Service, December 12, 2000.

Note: McCullough found it impossible to “blame” Palestinian terrorists. He cast all blame upon Israel.

“We condemn, without conditions, all acts of violence committed by both sides of the conflict. We ask that

you, in your upcoming meeting with Prime Minister Sharon, insist that all violence, including the violence of military occupation—house demolitions, repressive closures, land confiscation, destruction of trees, torture of detainees, and settlement activity—end immediately.

“It is evident to our churches, as well as the international community, that the allowance granted Israel by the United States for the destruction of the infrastructure of Palestinian self-rule, through targeted assassinations, reoccupation of land, and other measures, is a serious policy error. On behalf of the national churches and organizations that make up Churches for Middle East Peace, we appeal to you to convince Mr. Sharon to cease actions that enflame the Palestinian people and to encourage those Israeli leaders who seek to meet with Palestinian leaders.”

~Letter from Churches for Middle East Peace to President Bush, January 29, 2002. Churches for Middle East Peace is a cooperative program of 17 religious bodies, including the NCC and most of its major member denominations.

Note: The letter did not condemn any specific acts of violence carried out by agents of the Palestinian Authority. It contained no request that Yasir Arafat should cease words and actions that enflame the Palestinian people.

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“Israel will find peace and security through ending the illegal occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories. Palestinian security and peace and economic stability will be found behind secure borders in a civil and democratic society....

“Since United States’ aid has been used by Israel to prolong the illegal occupation of Palestinian land, we call for that aid to be formally monitored so that its use complies with United States law,

prohibiting its use in situations where it does not comply. Furthermore, we renew the United Methodist General Conference call, 'to deduct annually from any Israeli loan guarantees an amount equal to all Israeli settlement spending every year, including spending for settlements in and around Jerusalem' (Book of Resolutions 2000, #293, pp. 731-732)....

"We insist 'that the United States Government immediately release the remaining portion of humanitarian aid it promised to the Palestinian people in 1993, and encourage other nations to do the same' (Book of Resolutions 2000, #295, pp. 733-734)....

"We call for the creation of an independent Palestinian state as soon as possible...."

~United Methodist General Board of Church and Society statement on the Middle East, March 18, 2002.

Note: The statement does not discuss whether any changes in the policies of the Palestinian Authority might be necessary to move toward a "civil and democratic society" under its rule.

EPISCOPAL CHURCH U.S.A.

"Amid the terrible surge of violence in the Holy Land, I wish to thank you for your decision to send Secretary of State Colin Powell to the region and for your call for Israeli forces to withdraw from Palestinian cities. I am truly alarmed by the massive military response of Israel to the deplorable suicide bombings, and particularly by the reported executions, denial of access by medical personnel, and immense destruction of property and

infrastructure. Clearly, the two parties in this conflict no longer have the means or the will to control events."

~Letter from Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold to President Bush, April 5, 2002.

Note: The letter does not thank the President for his calls for Yasir Arafat to restrain Palestinian terrorists. Indeed, it does not acknowledge any connection between the "deplorable suicide bombings" and the Palestinian Authority.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

"While we do not condone the acts of violence by certain Palestinian extremists, we are appalled that Israel, in response, has continued to punish the entire Palestinian population and its leaders who have been your government's partners in the peace process. For the past year and a half, the Israeli army has continued to bombard Palestinian institutions and the civilian population, including those in refugee communities, with merciless attacks....

"We protest the continuing degradation of the Palestinian people by Israel. We again appeal to you for the immediate withdrawal of the military from the Palestinian territories. We urge you to renounce and to stop this violent madness and seek the course of peaceful negotiations, for the sake of justice, on which Israel's own security depends."

~Letter from Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick to Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, March 11, 2002.

Note: Kirkpatrick did not send any similar letter to Chairman Arafat. His words

suggest that he ascribes terrorist acts only to "certain Palestinian extremists"—not to the Palestinian Authority. He regards that authority as a "partner in the peace process."

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

"These [points of the WCC agenda] included the need to:

- address and condemn the Israeli military occupation and affirm the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance to injustice and foreign occupation;
- condemn violence against civilians and support non-violent resistance;
- insist on the 'application of international law as it applies to the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian right to resist that occupation, and all efforts for a negotiated peace settlement';
- address the right of Palestinians to 'self-determination on a sustainable sovereign state, side-by-side with Israel.'

"The delegation also called for pressure to be exerted both on Israel to end the occupation and on other governments, 'particularly the United States, to compel Israel to end the occupation.'"

~Report on a WCC consultation on the Middle East, in the WCC's Ecumenical News International, August 10, 2001.

Note: The WCC did not propose to exert any pressure on the Palestinian Authority and its sponsors.

f

Masked Palestinian children (front) join masked Islamic Jihad militiamen at an April rally in Gaza City. Oldline church statements often treat Palestinian terrorism as if it were the work of frustrated individuals, rather than being the product of organized movements that are encouraged, equipped, and subsidized by Arab governments.



21 Theses to Guide Christian Engagement with the Middle East

By Alan F.H. Wisdom

1. As Christians, we are called to effective solidarity with all who suffer. The Middle East today is a region of great suffering and oppression. The churches therefore have a proper concern to alleviate that suffering.

2. A more peaceful and prosperous Mideast would be less likely to host rogue regimes and terrorist groups that threaten U.S. and global security. And its nations would make more reliable and attractive trading partners for America and its western allies. Churches should understand these national interests and appeal prudently to them as they converse with U.S. policymakers.

3. As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers. Our objective in the Middle East should therefore be peace—to the extent that peace is possible in that particularly troubled part of this fallen world. We should pray for and aim toward a more comprehensive and lasting peace that would deal justly with all parties, but we should not show contempt for more limited measures of peace.

4. As Christians, we have special fraternal ties with the Christian churches in the Middle East. We have a duty in Christ to attend to the cries of those churches. We recognize that their very existence—a precious witness to Christ in the land of his birth, maintained through century upon century of hardships—is in danger.

5. At this point, most Arab Christians are quite hostile to Israel and sympathetic to the Arab governments and movements that are attacking or have attacked it. U.S. Christians need to understand the reasons why Arab Christians have taken this political stance. But we are not obligated to take that same stance ourselves, as we have our own distinct moral accountability.

6. Contrary to popular assumptions, the Arab-Israeli conflict is not the largest cause of suffering in the Middle East. Even if the state of Israel did not exist, tens of millions of Arabs would still be living in misery under oppressive governments.

7. The causes of Middle East misery are to be found primarily in religious, cultural, economic, and political systems that deny human freedom and dignity. U.S.

churches need to speak more directly about these “root causes.”

8. Calls to “balance” in addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict are appropriate insofar as “balance” means that we are sensitive to the sufferings on all sides and hold all sides to the same moral standards. We must disagree with both friends and foes of Israel who would hold it to a different standard than its Arab neighbors.

9. On the other hand, calls to “balance” are inappropriate if they imply a moral equivalence between Israel and the neighboring Arab states. In fact, the conflict is characterized by all sorts of asymmetries that it is foolish to ignore:

- a. In area and population, the Arab states are many times larger.
- b. The Arab states have much greater influence in the international economic system and international political bodies.
- c. Israel is at a much higher level of economic development.
- d. The Arab states have much larger military forces, but so far the Israeli military has proven itself more potent on the battlefield.
- e. Israel is a western liberal democracy. Like all democracies, it falls short of the ideal. But it has the political means to correct its shortcomings. By contrast, most Arab governments are essentially dictatorships whose rule depends upon military force.
- f. Israel’s stated strategic goal is simply to exist as a Jewish state, with its capital in Jerusalem and within secure and defensible borders. But the strategic goal of its Arab neighbors is more ambiguous. Historically, the goal that has been pursued on several occasions by military force has been the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state. Today some Arab leaders speak in international forums about the possibility of co-existing with a Jewish state confined to its 1967 borders. But many continue to offer verbal and material support to terrorist groups bent upon wiping out Israel.

10. U.S. church officials err when they attempt to attach intrinsic moral importance to points a, b, c, and d above. It is unreasonable to argue that Arab govern-

ments and movements deserve our support simply because their people are poorer and their armies are militarily weaker than Israel's.

11. Points e and f above, by contrast, have great moral significance. Israel is properly an ally of the United States, and deserving of the best wishes of American Christians, because it is a fellow democracy that aspires to similar ideals. The same cannot be said of the non-democratic Arab governments and movements.

12. Most major branches of the Church now recognize that the Jews remain a people chosen by God for particular blessings and responsibilities. But there is no consensus among either Jews or Christians about the role of the modern state of Israel in the fulfillment of God's covenant with the Jews. It is not wise for Christians to ground contemporary public policy arguments in disputed interpretations of Old Testament prophecies about the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. The founders of modern Israel did not make such ambitious claims for their political project, nor do most Israeli citizens today. They regard the state of Israel primarily as a refuge for Jews who have suffered persecution and genocide elsewhere in the world.

13. There is no magical historical date at which we can identify precisely fixed borders for Israel that are normative for all time. The borders of 900 B.C. were not immutable, nor are the borders of 1967. Thus the borders of a future Israel under a peace settlement are a matter of political prudence. The objective should be to situate the greatest number of people in states of their own choosing that will be economically viable, militarily defensible, and at peace internally and externally. Naturally, this will involve the withdrawal of Israeli troops from most of the territories occupied in 1967.

14. The common formula often heard on the lips of church leaders—that “Jerusalem is equally sacred to three great religions, and therefore it should be shared equally among them”—is misleading and unhelpful. The claims that Jews, Christians, and Muslims place upon Jerusalem are far from identical. For Jews Jeru-

salem is the holy city above all others, the place that God ordained for them to gather and worship in his presence. Christians may speak of Jerusalem as “holy,” but not in precisely the same sense. For Muslims Jerusalem is a holy city, but far beneath Mecca and Medina in rank.

15. Israel, like all states, has the divinely-appointed duty to defend its law-abiding citizens against armed aggression, by military force if necessary.

16. Israeli military actions should be subject to the limits of just war principles. They should be directed clearly toward stopping acts of terrorism and aggression. Israeli forces should distinguish clearly between Arab civilians and the terrorists and other hostile forces that have taken up arms.

17. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza may legitimately seek to have their human rights respected under a government of their own choosing. But terrorist attacks against civilians are never a proper means of remedying any grievance.

18. Church leaders are misguided when they point to the United Nations as the best agency for mediating and resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The UN has compiled a long record of one-sided resolutions on the Middle East.

19. The United States is in a much better position to mediate the conflict. Our government gives large amounts of aid to parties on both sides. We have shown appreciation for the legitimate goals of both sides, while being critical of some tactics on each side. Nevertheless, it is naïve to imagine that the United States could impose a peace settlement against the wills of the parties in conflict.

20. U.S. churches can contribute to alleviating Middle East miseries, first, by supporting a continuing Christian witness in the region. Second, U.S. churches can contribute through their teaching of basic Christian doctrines to their own members. Third, the churches can stimulate an open conversation among their members about the Middle East.

21. There are two habits in which U.S. churches indulge that are counter-productive to Middle East peace and justice. The first is the temptation to believe that we U.S. Christians know the precise details of a just and final settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The second is the tendency to become propagandists for one party in the Arab-Israeli dispute. **f**

For a fuller discussion of each thesis, and to learn why IRD staff and friends rallied in defense of Israel (left), please visit the IRD website at www.ird-renew.org.



INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

INDIAN CHURCHES
URGE RESTRAINT

As conflict brewed this spring between India and Pakistan, two countries with nuclear capability, Indian Christians were prominent among the voices urging restraint. The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), in a May 25 statement, pleaded for both sides to "use wisdom and avoid the danger of starting a nuclear war where both the countries will be losers." While giving "whole-hearted" support to the fight against terrorism, the Indian church council stressed that "war rhetoric is not an alternative for true patriotism which enhances peace in the country."

On the same day, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India asked India and Pakistan "to refrain from the path of an armed conflict and to work towards a solution of peace and dialogue to fight terrorism." The Catholic bishops said the peoples of the Indian subcontinent "would never want a war between the two countries as a solution to fight against terrorism, which has affected both the countries at the cost of hundreds of innocent lives."

The Christian minorities in both India and Pakistan stand in an especially vulnerable position, exposed to terrorist attacks from Hindu and Muslim extremists, respectively. It is those extremists which have been most vociferous in pushing for war over the disputed territories of Kashmir.

WCC CONDEMNS MOST
FORMS OF ENERGY

At a press conference on May 29, members of a 15-member team from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and related groups laid out their energy program for the world. Major points of the WCC plan included:

- "a global moratorium on exploration for new oil and coal deposits;
- "phasing out of nuclear energy plants everywhere in the world";
- implementing recommendations of an international commission

that would slow the building of hydroelectric dams.

Oil, coal, nuclear, and hydroelectric power represent, in fact, over 90 percent of the energy sources available today. In place of these proven sources, the WCC's only recommendation for new energy development was "sustainable renewables" such as solar and wind power.

The WCC delegates were speaking at a United Nations meeting in Bali, Indonesia, preparing for the August World Summit on Sustainable Development. They also advocated "the cancellation of foreign debt" of developing countries. Moreover, the ecumenical team called for "the identification and quantification" of reparations that "the North owes the South after centuries of colonialism, slavery and exploitation of natural resources."

STUDY SHOWS POVERTY
DOES NOT CAUSE TERRORISM

A review of international research on terrorists and their supporters suggests that "participation in terrorism and political violence is apparently unrelated—or positively related—to individuals' income and education." This conclusion challenges the reasoning of liberal church leaders, who frequently assert that poverty is the "root cause" of terrorism and therefore military action against terrorists is useless.

The research review, by economist Alan Krueger and Middle East scholar Jitka Maleckova, appeared in the June 24 issue of *The New Republic*. The authors cite a poll of Palestinians indicating that "support for violence against Israeli targets is widespread in the Palestinian population, and at least as great among those with higher education and higher living standards as it is among the unemployed and illiterate." They quote a United Nations relief worker who interviewed 250 Palestinian militants: "None of them were uneducated, desperately poor, simple-minded, or depressed. Many were middle class and, unless they were fugitives, held paying jobs." Studies from other countries yielded similar results.

The authors suggested that terrorism "is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings of indignity and frustration (perceived or real) that have little to do with economics." They maintained that poverty should be alleviated for the sake of the poor, not in a false hope of dissuading terrorists.

CHRISTIAN ROLE IN KOREAN
DEMOCRACY HIGHLIGHTED

A recent academic paper illuminates the disproportionate role played by Christians in South Korea's transition to democracy. Although Christians comprise only 25 to 30 percent of the country's population, nearly two-thirds of the members of parliament identify themselves as Christians.

Korean Christians were among the leaders of protests that eventually toppled the previous military regime in 1987. The first two civilian presidents since then have been a strongly committed Presbyterian and Roman Catholic, respectively. And out of South Korea's 1,150 non-governmental organizations—so crucial to building a democratic culture—70 percent are Christian-based.

All this evidence was brought out in a paper by Young-gi Hong, an organizational psychology professor at Hansei University in Seoul. He delivered the paper at a July conference on "The Bible and the Ballot Box: Evangelical Faith and Third-World Democracy." Hong stressed that "Korea is one of the few countries that have consistently improved civil liberties and political democracy since the transition to democracy." He added: "Korea has a new opportunity to promote democracy even in the midst of turbulent times. Participation of evangelical Christianity may prove crucial in this."

ERITREA ORDERS
CHURCH CLOSURES

Without warning or explanation, the government of Eritrea has informed all churches that are not Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Lutheran that they

must shut down. SIM (formerly Sudan Interior Mission), an evangelical group with a long history in the small nation on the Red Sea, received the notification on May 21.

The World Evangelical Alliance surmised that the Eritrean Orthodox Church may have pushed the government to close evangelical and Pentecostal churches "in the wake of what appears to be a budding revival movement occurring within the traditional Orthodox Church, as well as a recent outbreak of evangelical fervor within the Protestant community." The alliance said that Muslim groups may have also had a hand in the repression.

FILIPINO PARTNER CHURCHES OBJECT TO U.S. MILITARY

Some left-leaning Filipino church leaders have become vocal in their opposition to the revived U.S. military presence in their country. The Council of Bishops of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and Carmencita

Karagdag, a representative for National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and a member of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, have spoken up recently.

The UCCP bishops raised suspicions about the intention of the 1,200 American troops. Pronouncing that "it is a lie that U.S. troops are here to help the Filipino people," the bishops suggested that the purpose was merely "to hunt and punish those who are perceived to be America's enemies." They lamented, "The economic and military dependence of the Philippines on the U.S. has brought us to a miserable situation which is being exploited and taken advantage of by the U.S. government."

The U.S. and Filipino governments maintain that the mission is to train the Filipino military in counter-terrorism techniques for use against the Muslim extremist group Abu Sayyaf. The UCCP bishops conceded that Abu Sayyaf is "unquestionably driven by criminal motives." But they added: "Only


a comprehensive solution acceptable to the Moro [Muslim] people can remove the reasons and basis for the existence of quasi-political bandit groups like the Abu Sayyaf. Then, and only then, may police and military action be necessary and effective."

Carmencita Karagdag echoed the bishops in worrying about "the increasingly aggressive role" of the United States since last September 11. While visiting New York in late May, Karagdag denounced the joint military exercises as a violation of Filipino sovereignty and "a convenient pretext for expanding U.S. military presence and furthering American geopolitical interests."

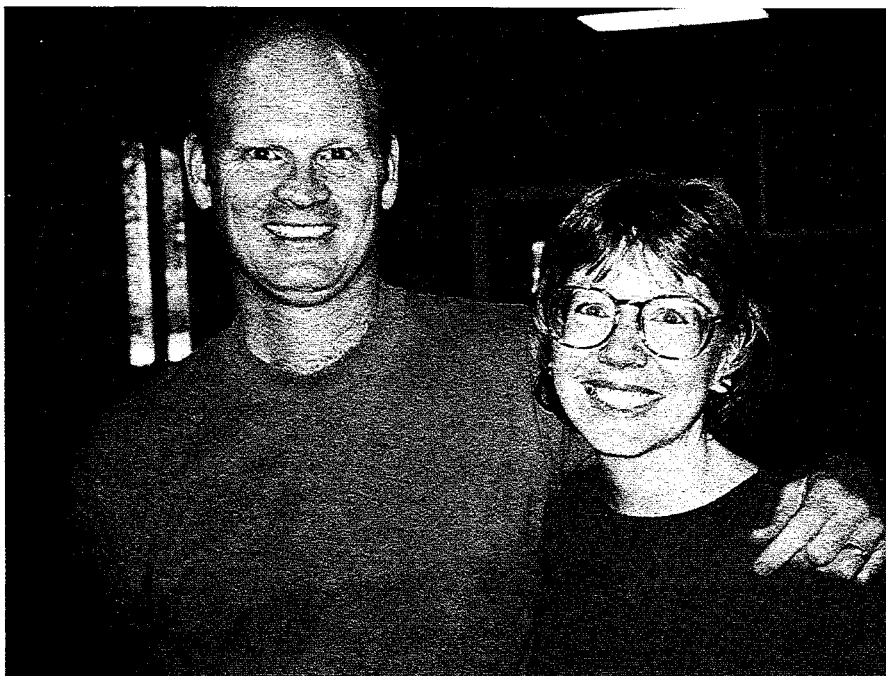
The left-leaning UCCP and NCCP are principal mission partners of several U.S. oldline Protestant denominations, which take their political cues from the Filipino church bodies. More conservative church bodies in the Philippines do not generally share the same hostility towards the United States.

NO PREACHING IN UZBEK ALLOWED

An official of the Uzbekistan government ordered a local Pentecostal church to stop all preaching and distribution of literature in the Uzbek language. In an interview with Keston News Service, Shoazim Minovarov of the government's Committee for Religious Affairs justified his action: "The fact is that there has been a large number of complaints about the Church of Christians of the Full Gospel of Uzbekistan from residents in the [neighborhood] where it is based. People have expressed concern that members of the church are trying to persuade Uzbeks to turn away from Islam and convert to their religion."

A similar order was transmitted to the local Jehovah's Witnesses. The government has also expelled all foreign Muslim missionaries, shut down many Muslim schools, censored sermons in mosques, and jailed suspected Islamist activists. Dmitri Pitirimov, press officer for the Uzbek Baptists, sent out an open letter citing recent incidents "which could soon lead to a significant restriction on religious freedom in our country." 

Missionary Martin Burnham was killed and his wife Gracia wounded as Filipino troops tried to rescue them from Abu Sayyaf rebels. Leftist Filipino Protestant leaders denounced the military campaign against Abu Sayyaf as "a convenient pretext for expanding U.S. military presence."



NORTH KOREA: THE SECRET DARK PLACE IN THE AXIS OF EVIL

By Faith J.H. McDonnell

Most of us will never know the names and faces of our North Korean brothers and sisters in Christ until we meet these valiant ones in Heaven. In 1948, as the Soviets were installing the dictator Kim Il Sung, there were 3,000 churches in the northern half of the Korean peninsula. The years that followed brought the systematic closing of those churches, destruction of Bibles, and either the execution or imprisonment of religious believers. The only religion allowed was the bizarre Kim Il Sung personality cult. And the country was sealed off from the outside world, ensuring that the sufferings took place in secret.

Conditions have eased only slightly over the intervening decades. But recently, through the testimony of some courageous North Korean defectors, aided by some bold international aid workers, North Korea's evil is coming to light at last.

Notable among those aid workers is Norbert Vollertsen, a German physician who spent 18 months in North Korea with the group Doctors Without Borders. Soon after arriving, Vollertsen offered his own skin for grafting on a badly burned patient. This action so impressed government officials that they gave Vollertsen the prestigious Friendship Medal, a VIP passport, and his own driver's license.

Without the usual government restrictions, he was able to travel freely across the country.

The German doctor felt as if he had traveled through time—back to his own nation under the Nazis. He saw starving, neglected children dying in decrepit hospitals, dressed in blue and white striped pajamas. He heard gangs of tiny, emaciated boys and girls daily forced to stand for two hours and join in patriotic songs idolizing the “Dear Leader.” He found casinos, gourmet food, and state-of-the-art hospitals for the elite in the capital, while everywhere else he found scarcity—no food, no running water, no medicine, no bandages, no heating.

Vollertsen agrees with President Bush that North Korea belongs on today's “axis of evil.” He is making it his life's work to provide the evidence. The doctor did not learn about North Korea's darkest evil—secret prison camps—until after departing the country. Then he met the North Korean defectors who had fled into China. They had been hunted by their own country as they slipped across the border, and now they are hunted by China, which offers bounties for the apprehension of North Korean refugees. Those unfortunate enough to be caught are returned to certain imprisonment and likely death in North Korea.

Vollertsen heard testimony like that of Mrs. Soon-Ok Lee, who saw the treatment of Christian prisoners in the Kae-Chun Rehabilitation Center while she was a fellow prisoner there between 1987 and 1992. She told how the Christians were special targets: deprived of rest, ordered to recant, beaten, and assigned the most difficult and dangerous jobs in the camp. Many, singing hymns as they were beaten, were taken to the electric treatment room, tortured, and killed. Some died as molten iron was poured out of a furnace upon them.

It is no surprise that North Koreans are willing to risk their lives by fleeing the country and hiding out in China. In recent months, groups of North Korean refugees have tried to storm foreign embassies in Beijing, seeking asylum. Dr. Vollertsen and friends are determined that the North Koreans will not make these attempts alone. The German doctor has spoken about the plight of North Korea all over the world. He continues to interview North Korean escapees and help them make their way to freedom.

The U.S. Congress has taken up the cause. On May 30, the House International Relations Committee sent a letter to the Chinese ambassador, asking China to stop returning defectors to an awful fate in North Korea. In June, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom called upon the U.S. government to press China to uphold its international treaty obligations and protect the refugees.

An International Coalition to Help North Korean Refugees has been formed to undergird these efforts in prayer and action by the worldwide Christian community. Although we do not know the names and have not seen the faces of our brothers and sisters in North Korea, we do know that we have an obligation to shine a light into the dark place where they still live.



Dr. Norbert Vollertsen talks with reporters as he awaits the arrival of 25 North Korean asylum seekers in Incheon, South Korea

RESOURCES

MAKING THE ARGUMENTS FOR BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

By Diane Knippers

In every age, the Church has been "sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed." Nowadays, one of the serious threats is sexual liberationism—the movement to cast aside 2000 years of Christian teaching on the proper place of sexual intimacy within the marriage of man and woman. This movement is today epitomized by the champions of what they call "GLBT" people (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender).

Clergy and laity alike must work hard to develop the arguments necessary to defend biblical faith and ethics. We offer a brief summary of recent resources to assist that effort.

Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon Press, 2001). If you only read one book on homosexuality, read this one. Robert Gagnon is an assistant professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He considers Scripture authoritative, while also using critical methods of biblical scholarship. Predictably, revisionists are scrambling to respond. All of Gagnon's critics that I have read finally concede that the Bible does indeed condemn homosexual intercourse. But they balk at his further well-reasoned argument that this conclusion is binding upon the contemporary church.

Gagnon offers a comprehensive survey of biblical teaching, setting each passage in context with extended citations from ancient Mediterranean history and literature. I couldn't think of a single issue raised by contemporary revisionists that he doesn't tackle, with clarity and grace. Were Jonathan and David homosexual lovers? Was the sin of Sodom merely

inhospitality? Was Jesus silent regarding homosexuality and, if so, why? Why should we listen to biblical writers who were allegedly ignorant of many varieties of sexual expression? (Gagnon destroys this last assumption with particular thoroughness.)



Richard Cohen, *Coming Out Straight: Understanding and Healing Homosexuality* (Oakhill Press, 2001). Now himself a therapist, Cohen tells the moving story of his own journey out of homosexuality. He also presents a model for transformative healing.

Dean Hamer and Peter Copeland, *Living with our Genes: Why They Matter More Than You Think* (Doubleday, 1999). Dean Hamer was the scientist who discovered what others labeled "the gay gene." But in this book, Hamer and Copeland dispel the myth that genetic influences, where they exist, are a "pre-programmed fate" to which we must "resign ourselves." They write: "People also can learn to deliberately change behavior.... Each time we exercise will power, we rewire the brain to overcome inborn temperaments.... Choosing good habits takes hard work, but the sharp edge of temptation can be dulled with practice."

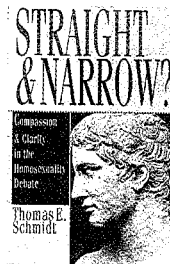
James B. Jacobs and Kimberly Potter, *Hate Crimes: Criminal Law and Identity Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Two lawyers associated with the New York University School of Law warn that increased "hate crime" legislation will criminalize certain designated prejudices (but not others), foster divisive "identity politics," and undermine justice.

Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific*


Research in the Church's Moral Debate (Intervarsity Press, 2000). This is one of the most current and readable surveys of scientific literature, with a concluding chapter defending historic Christian teaching on sexuality.

Catherine Clark Kroeger and Tina J. Ostrander, editors, *Reflections, Biblical and Otherwise, about Sexuality* (Reformation Press, 2001). In five brief essays, four evangelical scholars grapple with scientific, ethical, biblical, and philosophical issues in the sexuality debates. They address the cultural context of the Bible, the ways in which homosexual "orientation" has been "constructed" in modern society, the ways in which it reflects distorted relationships between men and women, and the argument for marriage as the appropriate place for sexual intimacy.

Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Baker Book House, 1996). A respected psychiatrist examines the scientific research regarding our sexual desires and behaviors, as well as the political campaign that turned the American Psychiatric Association into a bastion of pro-homosexual advocacy.



Thomas Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Intervarsity Press, 1995). Another significant contribution to the literature, this one by a teacher of New Testament and Greek.

John Stott, *Same-Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective* (Revell, 1998). This is a brief, easy to understand, and compassionate defense of biblical sexual standards, along with a call for the church to undertake a more sacrificial and loving ministry to homosexual persons. 

REASON TO HOPE FOR THE LUTHERANS?

By Steve Remppe

In August 2001, the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) elected Mark Hanson to the position of presiding bishop. In doing so, the assembly bequeathed to Hanson a denomination struggling to define itself on social issues such as gay ordination, and a church still bearing the scars from the battle over the decision to enter into "full communion" with the Episcopal Church.

Hanson's election owed much to the carefully cultivated perception of the bishop as a mediating force—someone who would be able to unite the disparate factions within the ELCA around certain core principles. Despite his liberal record as bishop of the Greater St. Paul Synod, Hanson's language of healing and peace struck a chord.

Bishop Hanson presents his vision for the ELCA in *Faithful Yet Changing: The Church in Challenging Times*, an 82-page book recently published by Augsburg Fortress. He touches a lot of points in calling for a church that is witnessing, worshiping, engaging, equipping, inviting, connecting, changing, and praying. Although the book leaves it unclear exactly how these eight objectives would be met, addressing the most volatile questions only tangentially, it does provide a

good sketch for the church's ministry in the 21st century.

I have a particular interest in Bishop Hanson's vision for the ELCA. Born and baptized in an ALC/ELCA congregation, I maintain a love for the church, its doctrines, and its traditions. And while I am currently attending a non-ELCA Lutheran church, I still long to see an ELCA that is a potent force for declaring the Gospel among the nations. With the naming of a new presiding bishop comes the hope that renewal is soon to follow.

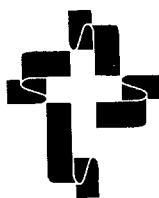
For Lutheran Evangelicals such as myself, there is some reason to be encouraged by this book. Hanson emphasizes evangelism, daily prayer and Scripture readings, and small group Bible study. He argues for the centrality of Word and sacrament in worship. All of these are steps in the right direction for a church that has become timid in its declaration of Christ, skeptical of individual spiritual discipline, and less than fully accessible to outsiders.

There is little said in this book that would warrant strenuous objection. There are, however, a number of conspicuous omissions. While Bishop Hanson indicates a desire to learn about other religions, he stops short of expressing a desire that members of these other

faiths would come to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. And his fleeting reference to "God's mysterious, powerful gift of sexuality" raises more questions than it answers. How is this gift meant to be manifested? Is this gift intended to be limited to marriage? The bishop's silence on these points is telling.

Hanson seems intent on maintaining at least a veneer of impartiality on these issues. He refrains from offering any specific solutions to current problems, instead remaining content to promote basic objectives with broad appeal across the spectrum of Lutheranism. Indeed, the very title of the book, *Faithful Yet Changing*, appears to be an attempt to bridge both the conservative ("faithful") and the liberal ("changing") elements of the church.

There are several instances where Bishop Hanson encourages a greater role for the local congregations. He expresses the hope that congregations will gather to discuss and pray about these issues and "clarify a vision" for the ELCA. If individual churches are willing to take up this challenge, perhaps the ELCA will be able to enact the "change for the sake of the Gospel" desired by the presiding bishop. This would truly be a change for the better. **f**



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