

# faith & freedom

REFORMING THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL & POLITICAL WITNESS

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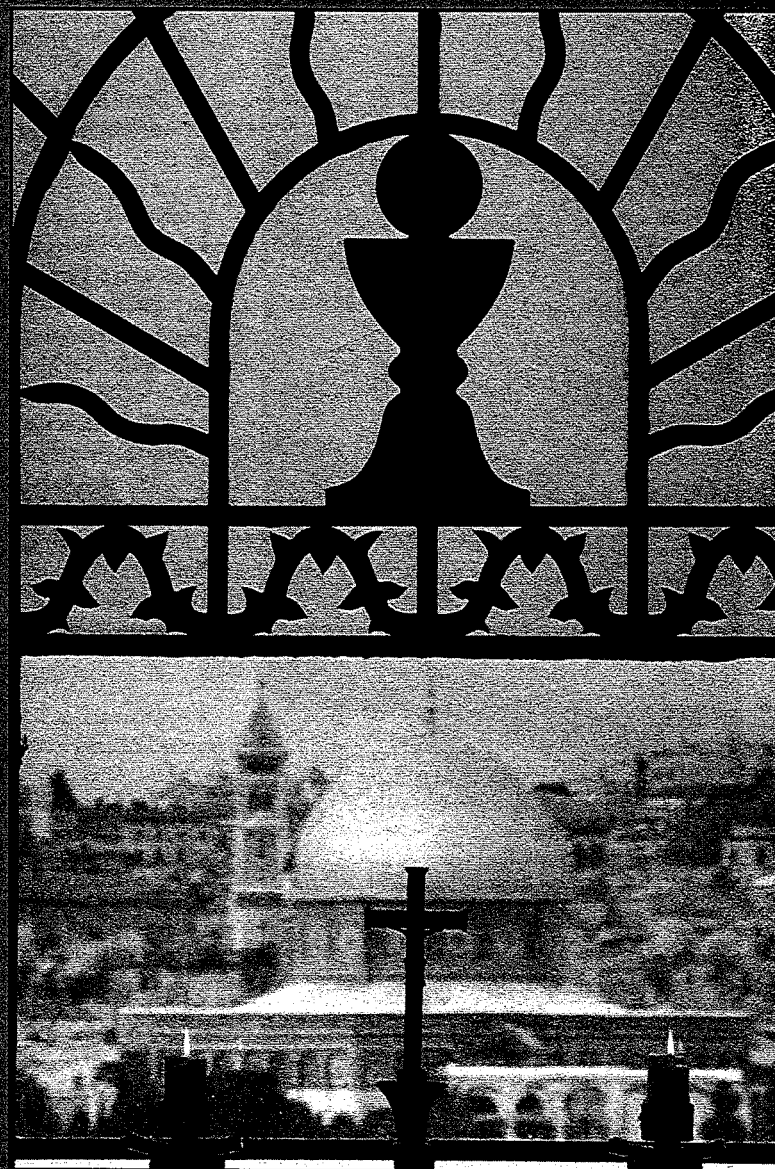
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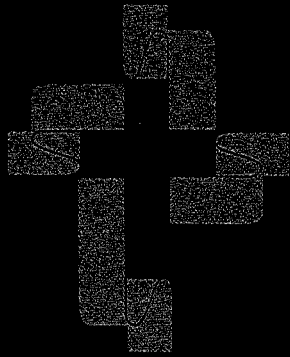
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WITH CHURCH NEWS, INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS, FROM THE PRESIDENT AND LETTERS.

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



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RELIGION & DEMOCRACY

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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

The hypocrisy of the National Council of Churches, UMC Board of Church and Society, and other mainline organizations never ceases to amaze me. The same liberals who proclaim the end of civilization as we know it every time they perceive the slightest breach of the separation of church and state now loudly proclaim that they want the government to accept the most radical form of Christian pacifism as its policy in Iraq. The same liberals who express hysterical alarm at the slightest hint of restriction on civil liberties in the United States express no interest whatsoever in the civil liberties of the people of Iraq. The same liberals worried about civilian casualties that might be caused in a war in Iraq can't bring themselves to acknowledge that more civilians are killed by the government of Iraq each month than are likely to be killed by military operations there. The same liberals who denounce any evidence of conservative Christian influence as a breach of the First Amendment now demand that their voices be heard in the halls of power or else.

The IRD is to be commended for continuing to put a spotlight on the reality that much of the leadership of the mainline churches and their ecumenical organizations are no longer true church leaders. They are nothing more than Democratic Party partisans and liberal political ideologues. Those of us seeking to uphold theological orthodoxy are ill-served when we continue to fund such hypocritical and hyper-politicized leadership.

The Rev. David Fischler  
Greensboro, NC

I am writing to thank you for the article "Excerpted Statements: U.S. Churches on Iraq" printed in your Winter 2003 issue of *Faith & Freedom*. I found these to be quite interesting.

I am a United Methodist pastor. I have talked personally with Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, with regard to the Board's stand on the war with Iraq. I consider their position to be way out of touch with the grass roots of the United Methodist Church. The Book of Resolutions 2000 recognizes the right of a just war. I write this letter knowing, with the rest of the world, of the murderous activities of Saddam Hussein and his regime. I believe this was a just war, and that President Bush was correct in calling for Saddam's removal.

It is sad, but much of what the General Board of Church and Society does today is neither representative of Christianity, nor of those individuals called United Methodists.

Dr. Thomas C. McGill  
Aston, PA

I find *Faith & Freedom* well grounded in fact in our current, turbulent world, and excellently presented. It has brought to mind some of the current problems facing our society that I would like to suggest for you to follow up.

First, the Sixty Minutes presentation on April 20, 2003, pointed out how the U.S. toleration of the way Israel has treated native Palestinians (including both Christians and Muslims) has aroused terroristic sentiment in predominantly Muslim nations. This perceived acceptance of this by the United States has been used as a rationale for terrorist attacks against the United States. We have not sufficiently insisted that Israel preserve the rights of these Palestinians.

Second, a parallel study of the Bible and the Koran, showing the similarities between the two, would help the Islamic understanding of our culture. For example, the equivalent of love thy neighbor as thyself may also be found in the Koran.

James E. Malcolm  
Arlington, VA

## PHOTO CREDITS

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# GOD IS WORKING AMONG US



by Diane Knippers

Much of the content of this issue of *Faith & Freedom* comes from late 2002 and early 2003. You will find several articles based on the “Confessing the Faith” conference in Indianapolis. This historic conference brought together renewal advocates in a wide range of North American denominations for reflection and encouragement. A feature piece consists of a set of guidelines that IRD

has proposed for churches seeking dialogue with Muslims. As the relationships between Islam, Christianity, and the West suddenly loom large in geopolitics, we believe that churches desperately need discernment. Another article tells how an IRD-sponsored prayer vigil for Sudan helped to bring hope for a long-suffering nation.

I apologize for our delay in getting this important material into print. In recent months, IRD staffers and board members have been in the thick of some major debates—over the war in Iraq, the Presbyterian understanding of marriage and the family, and the future of the Anglican communion. You may find many of our contributions to those debates on our website at [www.ird-renewal.org](http://www.ird-renewal.org).

But it is also good to step back and take a larger view of the reform movement—in church and in society—to which God has called us. Below are a few excerpts from my address at the “Confessing the Faith” conference:

Renewal in the historic Protestant churches in North America is at an important juncture. The current generation of renewal organizations largely began in the late sixties and subsequent decades. We were born out of conditions in our churches and in the society of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, although the theological problems in our churches date from modernist trends that are much older. Today, many in the founding generation of our current renewal groups are retiring.

Some of those founders may have thought that a strong dose of publicity and, perhaps, a bit of organizing would solve the problems of our churches. Those hopes surely have been disappointed. One important measure of the health of a church—membership statistics—shows our churches in continuing decline....

Our churches are declining and increasingly irrelevant, even on issues that are a top priority for church leaders. So, if vibrant, healthy, growing denominations are the goal of our reform movement, we have not achieved success....

So, do we press on?

The Confessing Theologians Commission has offered us a powerful statement of encouragement, admonishing us to “be steadfast” and to move forward (see p. 5). I’m convinced that this challenge is exactly right....

Too many contemporary Christians make the wrong assumptions about church renewal and reform. They confuse the goal or the ideal with the normal. They think that the normal or typical state of Christ’s Church is what it *ought* to be—unified, holy, courageous, peaceful, charitable, teaching truth at all levels. In case you haven’t noticed, the Church typically isn’t like that.

In fact, the biblical and historical evidence is that it never has been that way. I’ve concluded that church reform isn’t some unusual tangent activity. It is the *normal* responsibility of those who love God. It is *integral* to God’s redemptive project. We don’t reform the Church so that we can get on with the other tasks—mission, evangelism, discipleship, seeking justice and righteousness. No, church reform is part of the task of the Church....

If reform is a constant, what, then, are the attributes of our contemporary reform movements? What is God doing among us in this day?... I have identified six emerging characteristics:

1. Our renewing and confessing movement is mature and multi-faceted.... We are engaged in missions and in publishing. We are strengthening theological education. We are leading in new evangelism strategies from church planting to Alpha. We are engaged in micro-enterprise development and human rights advocacy. We are building marriages, defending the unborn and healing the sexually broken. We are changing the tenor and results at the assemblies and conventions and conferences of our denominations....
2. It is ecumenical....
3. It is profoundly theological....
4. It addresses moral issues....
5. The reform movement is a global movement—and must become even more so. We Anglicans recognize how much we need the witness of the growing body of Anglicans in the global South. We see our mutual dependence—the churches of Africa, Latin America and Asia need our resources, our technology. They need enormous help in countering poverty, combating AIDS, by building just and free societies. They need help with theological training to provide pastors for all the new converts. But we have realized how much we need them as well. We need their fervency, their gospel commitment, their evangelistic zeal, their towering faith....
6. God is raising up a new generation of reformers. God is renewing His Church, but it is a multi-generational project....

The major addresses from this Indianapolis conference are available in a new book entitled *Confessing the Faith: Reclaiming Historic Faith and Teaching for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Copies may be obtained from Reformation Press at 1-800-368-0110.

## NEW ECUMENICAL GROUP PLANNED

Preliminary groundwork has been laid for a new ecumenical group in the United States. Provisionally called "Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A." (CCT), the group intends to include Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, as well as denominations currently in the National Council of Churches. A CCT prospectus, released in January, will be presented to national bodies of denominations during the next few years.

According to the prospectus, CCT would "welcome churches, Christian communities, and national Christian organizations that: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scriptures; worship and serve the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and seek ways to work together in order to present a more credible Christian witness in and to the world."

CCT would be governed by an annual General Assembly, with a Steering Committee drawn equally from five "families" of churches: "Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Protestant, Historic Racial/Ethnic, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic." Decisions would generally be made by consensus. The prospectus anticipated that "in the early period,

our primary focus should be on" fellowship, prayer, and theological dialogue. Only later would it be possible to "foster Christian evangelism" and "speak to society with a common voice whenever possible."

CCT originated within the NCC as an attempt to "expand the ecumenical table" beyond the council's own constituencies. The CCT proposal was hailed in an NCC press release as "a vision for the most inclusive Christian organization ever in the United States." It is not clear whether CCT would supplant the NCC or exist alongside it. An IRD critique in 2002 warned that any new ecumenical organization "must be freed from the control of liberal Protestantism," allowing for "genuine theological and ethical representation from participating bodies."

## LIBERAL CHURCH LEADERS RESPOND TO PRESIDENT BUSH

Several speeches by President Bush early this year prompted a volley of rebuttals from liberal church leaders. National Council of Churches General Secretary Robert Edgar had a rapid negative response to Bush's State of the Union address. "The President didn't say it, but the country knows it: The union is in a state of great uneasiness," Edgar said.

The NCC executive continued, in phrases that could have been borrowed from a Democratic Party script: "Many people are uncomfortable with a national priority that provides major tax cuts for millionaires and pays for them with funds that ought to go to help children without health insurance...." Edgar is a former Democratic congressman.

Edgar also expressed concern about "the tone of the President's war rhetoric." He cited predictions that war in Iraq would produce "as many as half a million casualties," with "3 million people threatened with starvation."

C. Welton Gaddy, the Baptist minister who heads the Interfaith Alliance, fretted that Bush resorted too often to religious language. Such rhetoric "stifles

debate," "promotes sectarian beliefs," "leaves out whole segments of America," and "implies a lack of appreciation for the vastness of religious pluralism in this land," according to Gaddy.

Elaine Pagels, the Princeton religion professor known for her championing of Gnosticism, deplored the president's references to good and evil. "This is not political discourse," she protested. "This is the language of religious zealots, Christian and Muslim. When he [Bush] speaks of the 'axis of evil,' he is placing those who disagree with him in the realm of evil."

## NO TRIAL FOR METHODIST BISHOP

After an unusual public debate about the theology held by United Methodist bishops, a complaint against one of their number was dismissed in February. A review panel led by a fellow bishop decided that no trial would be necessary for Chicago-area Bishop Joseph Sprague. The panel simply asked Sprague to reaffirm a general adherence to denominational doctrinal standards, and it recommended more "dialogue."

A nationwide group of 28 UMC laity and clergy had requested a trial to examine Bishop Sprague's public denials of various tenets of Christian faith. During a 2002 speech at the Methodist-related Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Sprague made the following assertions:

- ❖ The virgin birth, as recounted in the Gospels, was "not intended as historical fact" but "to appoint poetically the truth about Jesus as experienced in the emerging church."
- ❖ Jesus did not possess "trans-human supernatural powers."
- ❖ Jesus "was not born the Christ, rather by the confluence of grace with faith he became the Christ..."
- ❖ "I cannot believe that his [Christ's] resurrection involved the resuscitation of his physical body."

After the IRD posted a transcript of Sprague's remarks on its website, controversy broke out across the denomination. Two fellow bishops publicly expressed disagreement with Sprague's views, while others defended him. Sprague has subsequently reiterated his unorthodox theology in a book published by the official United Methodist Publishing House.



Joseph Sprague, United Methodist Bishop in Chicago, is arrested at an anti-war demonstration outside the White House in March. Even as he opposed war in Iraq without any equivocation, Bishop Sprague was expressing doubts about basic Christian doctrines.

# MAINLINE CONFESSING MOVEMENTS SEEK UNITED FRONT TO COMBAT APOSTASY

by the Rev. Dr. Christopher Hershman

**R**eformation is the ongoing task of the church. Our efforts will reproduce precious gifts for our children," said Diane Knippers, President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. "We will no longer allow out-of-touch, declining mainline organizations—representing less than a third of American Christians—to claim the mantle of Christian unity. We believe in unity, but unity is only found in the truth of Jesus Christ."

Knippers spoke at "Confessing the Faith: Reclaiming Historic Faith and Teaching for the 21st Century," which was held in Indianapolis on October 24-26, 2002, and attended by approximately 700 clergy and laity from at least 32 states and several Canadian provinces. They represented "confessing movements" among United Methodists (UMC), United Church of Christ (UCC), Presbyterians (PCUSA), Episcopalians (ECUSA), Lutherans (ELCA), United Church of Canada, Disciples of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, American Baptists (ABC), Church of God as well as others.

Grassroots "confessing movements" are growing rapidly in mainline Protestant denominations—18 separate groups within PCUSA alone—to resist assaults upon classic orthodox Christianity. Seeking to organize a united front for church renewal, the conference approved "Be Steadfast: A Letter to Confessing Christians," which calls mainline Christians to stay within their respective denominations and endure despite persecution.

While contemporary society depreciates Christianity's distinctiveness—encouraging "cafeteria religion"—participants are particularly troubled by pressures being exerted by church leaders to abandon biblical authority, moral teachings on sex, marriage and family, the Trinity, and the unique role of Jesus as Savior.

Speakers, including Edith Mary Humphrey of Pittsburgh Seminary, decried the ideological agenda of some scholars who arrogantly determine which Bible passages should be believed. Donna Hailson, of Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia, explained how neopagan religions like Wicca have made considerable inroads within mainline denominations. Maxie Dunnam, of Asbury Seminary in Kentucky, cited an example of a California congregation touted by

the media for its "open-mindedness" because it had an atheist teaching Sunday school.

These trends correlate with mainline erosion. U.S. population grew 13 percent between 1990 and 2000. But mainline churches significantly declined, ranging from 2.2 percent in the ELCA to 14.8 percent in the UCC. They appear on a "collision course with reality" as they become increasingly irrelevant, average member age rises above 60, and clergy shortages could leave 50 percent of congregations without pastors within ten years.

Meanwhile, conservative denominations, such as Southern Baptists, Roman Catholics, and Assemblies of God, are growing dramatically. During the same period, the conservative Presbyterian Church in America grew 42 percent and the Wesleyan Church grew 47 percent. These growing churches are attracting mainline church mem-

bers, immigrants, and the unchurched. Dunnam encouraged orthodox believers to remain faithful despite pressure to substitute "inclusiveness" for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners. "Inclusiveness is a jealous god," said Dunnam.

Dunnam said the powerful message about Jesus Christ has been entrusted to the church, but presently the "enemy is at the door," and "the church is under siege" by church leaders and others who distort and suppress Christian teachings. Dunnam likened present conditions within mainline denominations

to "starvation," suggesting people both inside and outside the church are starving for the living bread of Jesus Christ. "They ask for bread," he said, "but are being given a stone. People leave because they are starving for the Word. The church has betrayed its first task and has been diverted from its core."

"This is a day needing Good News and we must not contain it," said Dunnam. He counseled orthodox believers to resist efforts to dilute the faith. "The church is in the world but not of the world. The church's task is not to adapt to the world but to convert the world." ✚

*The Rev. Dr. Christopher Hershman is the Pastor at St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Allentown, PA, and president of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessing Fellowship.*



*Over 700 attended the Association for Church Renewal conference in Indianapolis, representing most of the mainline Protestant denominations in the United States and Canada, including the United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church USA, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*



# BE STEADFAST

A Letter to Confessing Christians

*The Confessing Theologians Commission, a group of 18 prominent theologians from almost all of the mainline Protestant denominations in North America, gathered last September 20-22 at the invitation of Dr. Thomas Oden of Drew University School of Theology. The following document was developed by the Confessing Theologians as a letter to participants in the Confessing the Faith conference.*

*"God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.'"*

*2 Timothy 2:19*

## SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN THE LORD:

God alone renews and continues to bless his people. God has not abandoned his church, and calls us to keep faith with him and those dear to him. We are called to be obedient to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

In thanksgiving for God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we seek to humble ourselves before him, pray, seek his face, and turn from sin, that he may hear, forgive, and heal. We all stand under divine judgment; we all are in need of divine grace.

We give thanks also for this, the first North American

gathering of renewing and confessing movements. Your conveners have asked confessing theologians to address three urgent questions facing all mainline renewal movements.

*Why should we remain in our churches?*

*Why do our churches need faithful confessors?*

*Why does our society need faithful Christian confessors?*

## WHY SHOULD WE REMAIN IN OUR CHURCHES?

The challenges facing our churches today are indeed immense. We have all seen declines in biblical and theological literacy, catechesis, and spiritual formation. Our churches have experienced severe declines in numbers of congregations and in absolute numbers of members. We have also seen our churches rent by contentious argument, exhausted by never-ending conflict. Many grow weary, and wonder if they and their congregations should stay.

Our own experience speaks to this question, too. We have all passed through long seasons of anguish and travail, and we anticipate more. We are still here. The Holy Spirit has not abandoned our churches, neither will we.

Resignation, quietism, and despair do not serve the church catholic and the communion of saints. We urge our brothers and sisters not to withdraw, but mutually to encourage one another to a struggle in which there is good hope. Our Lord reminds us, "God removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes to make it bear more fruit" (John 15:2). We pray God will give us courage, perseverance, and mettle for the task.

Much work has been begun by the various renewal movements among our churches. We note with thanksgiving the revival of Bible study, renewed interest in evangelization, fresh seasons of prayer, and renewed concern with the plight of the poor. We have committed ourselves to the ongoing life of the churches in which God has placed us, and we pledge our best efforts as theologians of the church to those who are engaged in this divine work of reform and renewal.

It is a beginning, and must continue, commending ourselves and our denominational leadership to God with fear and trembling.

But ultimately the reason we cannot and must not leave our denominations is that the Gospel can still be freely proclaimed in them and the sacraments administered without hindrance. However true

*"But ultimately the reason we cannot and must not leave our denominations is that the Gospel can still be freely proclaimed in them and the sacraments administered without hindrance."*

it may be that "other gospels" are also heard in our midst, none of our churches have legislated against the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In such a situation, it is unnecessary for

congregations to turn their backs on their churches.

## WHY DO OUR CHURCHES NEED FAITHFUL CONFESSORS?

Churches need faithful confessors for one essential reason: a church that is unable to confess its faith is a lame and withered church. The church needs faithful witnesses in order to be the church of Jesus Christ.

We believe that God's call to be faithful witnesses within the churches requires not only truthful confession, but also a long-term effort to reform our institutions. Our deliberative, legislative, administrative, and educational structures in many instances do not faithfully serve the church's mission and pastoral obligations. The work and witness of faithful confessors helps to reclaim and redirect these institutions toward their proper ends. We, therefore, believe that confessing movements are necessary if the institutional forms of our churches are to be tied to God's purposes for his church.

We note with joy how renewal movements in many churches have led to the discovery of a common bond in the faith of the church catholic and mutual encouragement in the Gospel. Across the renewal movements, we rejoice in the recovery of sound doctrine,



*Dr. Thomas Oden is the author of many books, including the recent *Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity*. Oden is the Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology and Ethics at Drew University, and Chairman of the Board of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. He also chaired the Confessing Theologians Commission that drafted the letter below.*

(Rom. 15:12). Confessing Christ requires the discipline of life, personal and corporate, private and public.

In the absence of faithful Christian witness, society establishes false idols. The twentieth century is littered with the victims of secular ideology. Nazi and Marxist ideologies produced Auschwitz and the Gulag. The North American threat comes from a more benign form of atheism that banishes Christian witness from the public square. Consumerism, materialism, individualism, and hedonism rush in to fill the void. Dogmatic atheism brutalizes and destroys the church. The more benign and civil atheism seduces and marginalizes the church. Disoriented by the ideology of moral relativism, some church leaders haphazardly champion fashionable causes. In each case, the savor of the church and the light of Christ is lost.

In the mercy and power of God, a renewed church will reform public life. Christian witness reminds government of its accountability to God and empowers the faithful to fulfill their duties as citizens. In teaching us to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, the Christian Church supports

a chaplaincy for our favorite political party. Living in a powerful country, we must not exaggerate our ability to influence events for either good or ill. A renewed witness calls for appropriate humility, repentance, and self-criticism.

These are our prayerful and considered responses to the questions that have been posed to us.

#### BE STEADFAST IN FAITH & HUMILITY

**W**e thank God for the hunger that he has placed in the hearts of people for reform and renewal, for clarity concerning the things of faith, for godly instruction, and holiness in life. We rejoice in our work together for the faithfulness of Christ's church.

We know that along with God's great blessings in the work of the renewal movements come temptations to timidity, faithlessness, and presumption. Our work for renewal involves repentance and amendment of life as well as witness. The empowerment for our ministry comes from abiding in Christ the true vine, apart from whom we can do nothing.

Christ has told his disciples that persecutions will come, but as James reminds us we are to count it all joy when we meet various trials. In that joy,

*"In our zeal for justice, we must not confuse specific policy proposals for prophetic proclamation, nor collapse the church into a chaplaincy for our favorite political party."*

for example the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine of the unique, saving significance of Christ's person and work. God has enabled many to recover their intellectual nerve. God has also blessed our churches in other ways through the work of the renewal movements. In some quarters, we see fresh vitality in worship and in preaching. In other quarters, we witness new ventures in mission, the renewal of personal piety, and an increase in enthusiastic discipleship. In still other places we see increased reading of Holy Scripture, deepened petitionary prayer, and a more profound embrace of God's concern for the poor.

God has given us a spirit of repentance and shed abroad his love afresh in our hearts. We expect further blessings in the years ahead, and we anticipate that God will continue to use renewal movements for the sustaining and furtherance of such blessings.

#### WHY DOES OUR SOCIETY NEED FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN CONFESSORS?

**F**aithful Christian witness humanizes society and heals the nations. St. Paul teaches, echoing Isaiah, "The root of Jesse shall come, one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope"

space for political disagreement and debate. It endorses finite patriotism—loyalty without idolatry, criticism without cynicism. The Gospel champions the sanctity of human life, urging us to protect the weak, the vulnerable, and the innocent. A robust faith teaches us that the fruits of our labor are a gift from God, to be used for the common good. Spiritual renewal engenders a right ordering of sexuality and family life. A confident orthodoxy fosters care for creation for its own sake and for the sake of human flourishing. Most importantly, even in times of great social crisis, the Lordship of Christ inspires a hope that will not despair.

In our zeal for justice, we must not confuse specific policy proposals for prophetic proclamation, nor collapse the church into

and confident of his great faithfulness, let us together proclaim the Gospel by which we have been saved. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. ✚

# CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

*A Guide for Churches*

by Alan F.H. Wisdom

**W**ithin the Church, Christian-Muslim relations have been largely the concern of a small group of specialists. All that changed on September 11, 2001. Who are Muslims? What do they believe? What are the differences among Muslims? Can Christians and Muslims live together peacefully in the same society? These and other questions have fueled an outpouring of interest in education and encounters between Christians and Muslims.

A particular danger is over-simplification about Islam and Muslims—either positive or negative—that thwarts true dialogue, true education, and genuine Christian mission.

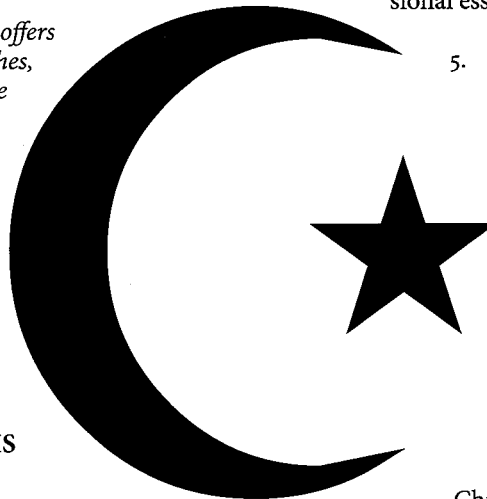
The Institute on Religion and Democracy offers the following guidelines to individuals, churches, and Christian organizations, particularly in the West, that aspire to interact with Muslims. The guidelines were released at a meeting in Washington, DC, on May 7 co-sponsored by the IRD and the National Association of Evangelicals. That meeting and the guidelines received wide coverage, from the New York Times and Washington Post to the Beliefnet website and PBS's "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly." Further suggestions, feedback, and reports regarding efforts at dialogue are welcome.

## IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE, IT IS APPROPRIATE AND NECESSARY TO:

1. Seek to understand Islam and Muslim peoples. Most U.S. churchgoers know little about Islam. If our churches are to show Christ's love effectively to our Muslim neighbors (near and far), we must clear away misconceptions and gain accurate insights into Muslim beliefs and practices.
2. Open ourselves to talk with all varieties and stations of Muslims. Of course, we recognize that some Muslims will decline the invitation to dialogue. But we must let them make that choice, rather than screening our potential interlocutors for their presumed compatibility with our own perspectives.
3. Give testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is our duty to do so. Ultimately, Christ himself is the greatest blessing that we could offer to our Muslim interlocutors. The 2002 Oxford Consultation on the Future of Anglicanism noted helpfully: "Saint Paul uses dialogue and Saint Luke uses *dialogomai* to describe evangelism. It may involve arguing, explaining, proving, proclaiming and persuading (Acts 17:1-4, 17)" (see [www.wycliffe.ox.ac.uk](http://www.wycliffe.ox.ac.uk) for the consultation reports). It is our

hope that numbers of Muslims would be persuaded by the testimony of Christians whom they encounter.

4. Make sure that the Christians entering into dialogue with Muslims have a firm grasp of an orthodox faith in the mainstream of the Christian tradition. Since their faith may be challenged and stretched in the dialogue, the Christian participants must know where the heart of that faith lies and where its boundaries are. Churches do no favor to the Muslims by sending out Christian "representatives" whose own faith is uncertain, confused, self-contradictory, and unable to distinguish between confessional essentials and their own idiosyncratic views.



5. Endeavor to have the Christian side of the dialogue represent not just the U.S. churches, but also the global Christian community. It would be preferable to have persons in attendance who could address Islam from an African or Asian Christian perspective—particularly Christians who have lived as a minority group within predominantly Muslim nations. If the presence of such persons is not possible, some means must be found to keep their perspectives in mind. What cannot be permitted is a situation that reduces Christian-Muslim dialogue to another "North-South" confrontation, as if Christianity were equivalent to the "North" and Islam to the "South." In fact, we know that a growing proportion of the world's Christians live in the "South," and millions of Muslims are living in the "North." For this same reason, the Muslim side of any global dialogue ought to include not only Muslims from predominantly Islamic developing nations, but also Muslims who live as minorities in non-Muslim nations.

6. Affirm some points of theology and morality that Islam and Christianity have in common. These illustrate the "natural law" or "common grace" that is revealed to all, as Paul argues in Romans 1-2. This affirmation is particularly strategic, as secularists in western societies often mischaracterize natural law principles as narrowly Christian doctrines that do not belong in the public square.
7. Address the deep differences between Islam and Christianity. Most basically, these relate to the person of Jesus Christ, who is at the center of our Christian faith. Muslims do not believe that he was God incarnate, that he truly and willingly died on the





Left to Right: Paul Marshall, Senior Fellow at the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House; Diane Knippers, President of the IRD; Clive Calver, President of World Relief and Ted Haggard, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, at the May 7 meeting of Evangelical leaders where the Guidelines were released.

cross, that his death was the one atonement for all human sin, and that he was truly raised from the dead for our eternal life. In addressing these differences, Christians show themselves wiser and more winsome when they place their emphasis on positive affirmations of their own Christian faith. Negative judgments about Islamic beliefs and practices—although these are sometimes necessary and are often implicit in the affirmations—should not be the principal theme of the Christian participants in the dialogue.

8. Work together with some Muslims on certain public issues in which we and they may have similar concerns (for instance, free exercise of religion in the United States, opposition to abortion, and promotion of refugee resettlement). We do so for the same reason that Christians are prepared to work with Jews, Mormons, and even atheists where we share common convictions about what justice requires.

9. Find ways in which our churches might practically show the love of Christ by being of service to our Muslim neighbors, here in the U.S. and internationally. We need to ask our Muslim interlocutors about the needs in their communities.
10. Discuss concepts of democracy, human rights, and religious freedom, as promulgated in international covenants to which most Muslim nations have subscribed. U.S. Christians should discuss how we find these concepts in accord with our Christian faith, how western societies developed these concepts historically, and the benefits that they have brought our societies. We should encourage our Muslim interlocutors to consider these concepts in the context of Islam, its history, and their own personal experiences.
11. Allow the open expression of concerns, fears, and grievances regarding the other party in the dialogue. A dialogue cannot advance very far unless it addresses the problems that each side

perceives in the other. U.S. Christians must expect to hear Muslim complaints about the medieval crusades, modern western imperialism, and contemporary American society. It is fair to acknowledge that some of those complaints have validity. But it is neither historically accurate nor helpful for the Christians to accept the notion that the West is to be blamed for most of the ills in the Muslim world. Muslims must take primary responsibility for their own societies, as the historian Bernard Lewis argues.

12. Intercede for fellow Christians (and other religious minorities) who suffer persecution or restriction in predominantly Muslim nations. Particular concerns relate to bans on religious proselytism or conversion, state attempts to restrict or control religious activities, attempts to subject Christians to Islamic *sharia*, and other legal and political structures that treat Christians as second-class *dhimmi*. Christians should appeal to their Muslim interlocutors on the basis of reciprocity. Christians in Muslim nations ought to enjoy the same freedoms that Muslims do in the West. And as Muslims commit themselves to safeguard the liberties of Muslims in America, so we must challenge Muslims to ensure religious freedom for Christians and other minorities in Muslim nations.

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**IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE, IT IS INAPPROPRIATE AND DAMAGING TO:**

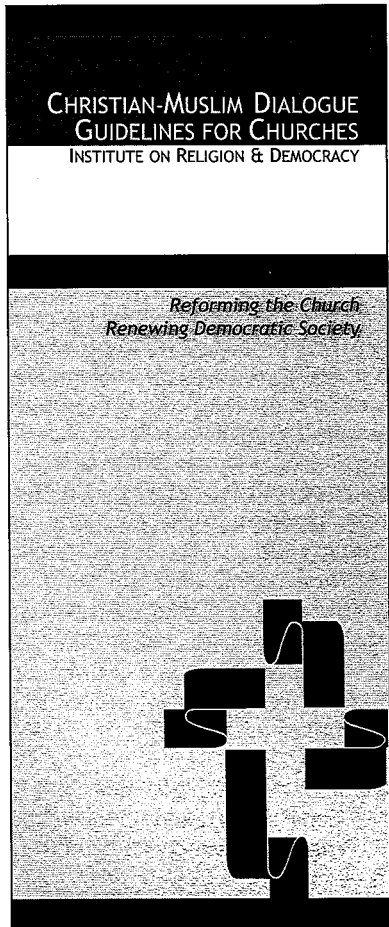
1. Attempt to meld Christianity and Islam, pretending that they have the same basic teachings and that the differences between the two are merely trivial points of theology.
2. Aim to establish inter-faith organizations that embody a new "macro-ecumenism," joining Christians and Mus-

*continued on page 10...*

lms in a unity analogous to the unity of the Body of Christ. If Christians do participate in inter-faith organizations, these should be merely forums for dialogue and channels of limited cooperation – not bodies that pretend to a false unity where none exists.

3. Try to formulate and celebrate common acts of worship. As Christians who worship God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as instructed by our Lord Jesus, we find any worship that omits those names and concepts of God (offensive to Muslims) to be impoverished rather than enriched. We do not wish to strip our worship down to the point that Muslims would find it acceptable, nor do we require Muslims to reduce their worship to a point that would be acceptable to Christians. It

*“...it is neither historically accurate nor helpful for the Christians to accept the notion that the West is to be blamed for most of the ills in the Muslim world. Muslims must take primary responsibility for their own societies.”*



is better to worship alongside Muslims, with them practicing what they consider to be proper worship while we Christians observe, and vice versa, rather than trying to have a common worship.

4. Expect that all blame for Christian-Muslim conflicts can be assigned to parties in the dialogue. The conflicts are too complicated and longstanding, and the dialogue too incomplete, for this assumption to hold. As Paul Marshall observes, “The Muslims who actually

participate in dialogue are not usually the ones engaged in murder, kidnapping, or the rape of Christian women” (*Their Blood Cries Out*, p. 220). Likewise, an Eastern Orthodox or African Christian may not feel personally culpable for the crusades or Western European imperialism. Of course, Christians may express regret for abuses that other Christians have committed against Muslims, as God convicts us of those abuses. But we must not demand apologies from our Muslim interlocutors as the price for dialogue, nor must they require apologies from the Christian participants in the dialogue. We must not imagine that the differences between Islam and Christianity can be reduced to particular clashes.

5. Speak of the world as if it were neatly divided into spheres of influence, Muslim and Christian (and other), with no overlap or movement between the spheres. As noted above, there are millions of Christians in predominantly Muslim nations, and vice versa. In a free society Christians can convert to Islam, and vice versa. We cannot accept the notion that there is an “Islamic world” in which western Christians have no right to “meddle.” And, of course, Muslims have every right to be interested and involved in what goes on in western nations.

6. Talk only to elite Muslim scholars and religious officials who present a “text-book version” of Islam. It may be more important to know the “popular Islam” as it is practiced on the street. We may learn more, and have a more fruitful conversation, by going to the local Muslim grocer than by going to the imam at the mosque.
7. Play political games inside the Muslim community, elevating leaders that we Christians favor and ignoring those that we dislike. It is not our place as

Christians to determine who is and who is not an authentic leader in the Muslim community. We should

simply talk and cooperate with all who will talk and cooperate. Naturally, some Muslims will be more willing to talk and cooperate than others. It is likely that our Muslim interlocutors will be more “moderate,” more tolerant, more interested in democracy, human rights, and good relations with the West. And it is undeniable that we would prefer to have such persons exercise more influence within the Muslim community for the sake of the values just named. But our ability to boost them inside their own religious community is, and should be, quite limited.

8. Assume that dialogue, in itself, is the solution to the theological and political issues between Christians and Muslims. Dialogue may clarify the real issues and remove some imagined issues. It may enable Christians and Muslims to work together more readily on matters where cooperation is possible. Mutual ignorance is a problem between Christians and Muslims; however, it is not the deepest problem. As Paul Marshall remarks, “The [extreme Islamist] people engaged in persecution are neither stupid nor uneducated... We will not understand persecution if we think it is a mere misunderstanding to be resolved through more education and chatty conferences” (*Their Blood Cries Out*, p. 220).

Brochures with the text of these guidelines are available from the IRD. Please call (202)969-8433 or email [enelson@ird-renew.org](mailto:enelson@ird-renew.org) for more information.

## INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

### DANISH PASTOR DENIES EXISTENCE OF GOD

The state-sponsored Lutheran Church in Denmark has suspended Thorkild Grosboll for controversial statements made concerning the existence of God and the role of Jesus.

"I do not believe in a physical God, in the afterlife, in the resurrection, in the Virgin Mary," said Mr. Grosboll, the pastor in the small town of Tarbaek. "And I believe that Jesus was a nice guy who figured out what man wanted. He embodied what he believed was needed to upgrade the human being."

Bishop Lise-Lotte Rebel, explaining the suspension, said that Mr. Grosboll's comments are "creating doubt and confusion about the church's values." She added, "A pastor is an employee of the state who has obligations, and he cannot say everything publicly just by claiming that his freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Danish Constitution."

Mr. Grosboll has received support from his parishioners in Tarbaek. The parish council of the church voted unanimously to reinstate the pastor. A local rally on his behalf drew hundreds of participants.

"Danes, we don't talk too much about God, and Christianity is not a big force here," said church member Ulrik Spork. "His [Grosboll's] beliefs mirror mine. I don't

think the earth was created by God in six days. I don't believe it's a problem."

### PROPOSED LAW IN INDIA WOULD RESTRICT RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS

The Indian government is preparing to enact a law that would require any individual seeking to convert to a different religion to submit a written application to local authorities. To receive permission to convert, applicants would have to show that they had completed secondary school. Unauthorized conversions would be punished by fines of 1,000 rupees (\$21) per day.

Critics of the proposed law warn that the requirements are aimed at preventing lower-caste members from deserting Hinduism. "It is nothing but asking for the impossible," said the Rev. Thomas John Thevethundiyil, a Presbyterian youth minister in South India. "How many among lower-caste Dalits and tribals would have completed even a fifth grade of schooling?" India is estimated to have 350 million illiterates.

It is not necessary for the new federal "Change of Religion Rule" to be approved by the Indian parliament. India's Supreme Court decreed on September 1 that there is no "fundamental right" for an individual to change religions. This ruling seemed to contradict Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Ev-

eryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief...."

### CHINESE CHURCH LEADER REPORTED DYING IN PRISON

Pastor Gong Shengliang, jailed leader of the South China Church, is suffering from severe health problems—the result of repeated beatings and mistreatment from his captors, according to family members.

Gong is serving a life sentence for leading an "illegal cult" and for allegedly raping and beating church members. Several church members who had testified against Gong have since recanted their testimonies, complaining that they had been forced to make false accusations under torture. Global protests by human rights organizations resulted in Gong's initial sentence of death being reduced to life in prison.

Family members have been denied access to Gong since April. Chinese officials claim that the pastor was isolated to prevent the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). An unnamed source within the prison has since communicated with the family, informing them of regular brainwashing sessions and repeated beatings.

"We are not allowed to see for ourselves," said Gong's sister, "but the news we have is not good." A letter from the South China Church in June reported that 63 church members remain in prison, while some 500 others are "on the run."

### WCC LEADER SAYS BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT 'IS PREACHING THE GOSPEL'

Federico Pagura, one of the World Council of Churches presidents, waxed enthusiastic about the new leftist president in Brazil. "President Lula [nickname of Luiz Inacio da Silva] is preaching the Gospel when he says that his aim is that, by the end of his term, not a single child will go to bed hungry," according to Pagura. The WCC official agreed with a Uruguayan Catholic priest who had contended that the focus of preaching the Gospel in Latin America today should be "an approximately eight-meters long tube called the digestive system."

Pagura, an Argentine Methodist bishop, was speaking in January at a WCC-sponsored forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. He boasted of coming from the city of Rosario, "the home of that Latin American patriot, doctor and revolutionary known as Ernesto 'Che' Guevara." The WCC leader quoted a Uruguayan writer in praise of communist Cuba, where "people might lack everything else, but they have human dignity to spare."

Cuban dictator Fidel Castro (left) and Brazilian president Luiz Inacio da Silva (center). A top WCC official praised da Silva and Castro's Cuba.



# FAILING THE TEST OF FAITH

## *The Oxford Declaration on Global Warming*

by Phillip W. De Vos

*The environment continues to capture the attention of various Christian churches and groups. While the IRD does not take a position on the scientific and public policy issues at stake, we do encourage critical discernment and vigorous debate. To that end, we offer a critique of the influential 2002 "Oxford Declaration on Global Warming."*

The July 2002 "Oxford Declaration on Global Warming" is a rather traditional document in the now constant barrage of environmental pronouncements emanating from various coalitions of religious leaders, policy makers, and scientists. What sets the declaration apart are the participants in the conference that produced it. They went far beyond the usual suspects on the left. The 78 participants included officials of the U.S. Catholic Conference, the U.S. National Association of Evangelicals, the Reformed Church in America, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The support of such persons lends credibility to the environmentalist crusades now being championed by the World and National Councils of Churches.

"The Earth's climate is changing, with adverse effects on people, communities and ecosystems," according to the Oxford conference participants. "Human activities, especially the burning of coal, oil and natural gas" are to blame. This "human induced climate change," says the declaration, is "a moral and religious issue" compelling churches to act for the sake of "the poor, the vulnerable and future generations."

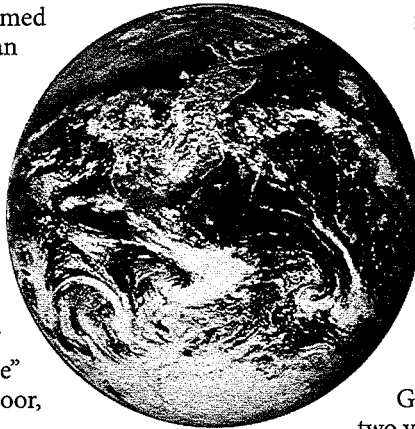
The action that the participants recommend is for churches to "urge immediate and responsible action by national governments" to ratify and implement the Kyoto Global Climate Protocol. The Oxford Declaration defends the most controversial aspects of that complicated protocol. It calls for "reducing global emissions of carbon dioxide (the most important greenhouse gas) to below 1990 levels well before the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Because "industrialized nations have largely caused the problem," they "need therefore to make much greater reductions in emissions."

In order to gain a clear understanding of these statements, it is essential to view them against the background of what is popularly termed the "sustainable development agenda." The sustainable development agenda has, as one of its core beliefs, a statist ideology that holds that states, or, more to the point, empowered international or supranational agencies must carefully curb economic growth to meet political goals. In most cases, this agenda is pursued under the rubric of concern for the environment and the preservation of resources for use by future generations.

There are six fundamental convictions involved in the sustainable development agenda, a few of which offer significant moral and logical contradictions for a person of faith. The various policy prescriptions recommended by sustainable development advocates

are not monolithic, and not all supporters of those policies necessarily endorse the full agenda. Nevertheless, the following convictions underlie that agenda:

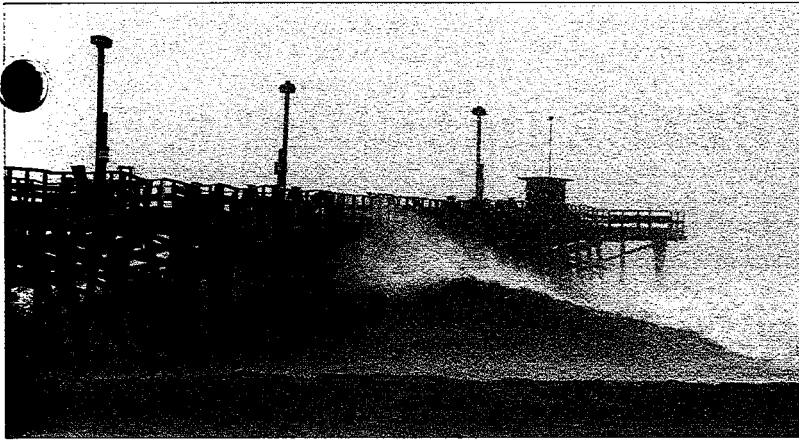
- ❖ A perception that the biosphere imposes limits on economic growth;
- ❖ A lack of confidence in either science or technology as leading to human betterment;
- ❖ An extreme aversion to environmental risks;
- ❖ Support for the moral equality of all creatures and the imperative to redistribute wealth;
- ❖ Professed concern over population growth and faith in the efficacy of education; and
- ❖ Seeking as goals the survival of species and the protection of the environment and of minority cultures, rather than economic growth per se.



The anthropological and economic worldview at the foundation of this agenda is the "steady-state" paradigm, paired with a "zero-growth" economic model. Such a worldview is directly at odds with orthodox Christian anthropology, which understands that human activity is additive to creation's value. The sustainable development agenda, on the contrary, understands humans to be primarily consumers and polluters, detracting from creation's natural beauty and worth. Given that humans are created to love, honor, and serve God, it is not superficial or trivial to note that these two views are fundamentally irreconcilable.

The economic and political worldview employed by the sustainable development movement attempts to redefine the meaning of development, which is normally understood as economic growth. The definition offered by sustainable development advocates construes development to be a process of sustaining that which we already possess. Within such a worldview, the economic "pie" is only so big, and so for the sake of us all, humanity must sustain that which it currently possesses, and then redistribute it equally in order to stave off the impending crisis as best we can. According to this mindset, it would simply be impossible, and perhaps even dangerous, for developing nations to avail themselves of the same economic, political, and technological advances that are the source of Western economic development. I cannot help but think such an agenda masks present selfishness as concern for the future.

The Oxford Declaration is an attempt to "Christianize" the sustainable development agenda by serving up statements wrapped in the language of religion and morality, deriving their credibility from a coalition of religious leaders, policy activists, and scientists. The make-up of these groups usually consists of those who have already accepted the policy aims and political goals of the sustainable development agenda.



Some scientists claim that global warming produces increasingly violent weather, such as the recent Hurricane Isabel. Others are skeptical.

The Oxford Declaration adopts the “greenhouse hypothesis” as an article of faith. It accepts as fact that ecosystems are in collapse, global weather patterns are changing, and that these factors are leading to a crisis. The cause of this crisis, according to the declaration, is human activity. It follows that there is a moral imperative to restrict human activity in order to spare the environment, as much as possible, from any further harm caused by human activity, especially those activities pertaining to economic development, procreation, and technological innovation.

The fallacy of this argument is two-fold:  
 1. The Oxford Declaration misunderstands and misreads orthodox Christian anthropology. 2. The scientific evidence is too conclusively applied and employed.

Traditional or orthodox Christian anthropology understands creation to be of service to man’s needs and subject to man’s stewardship. As a result, something can be understood as a resource only in relation to the applied ingenuity of human expertise meeting genuine human needs. Man is not theologically, morally, or ethically equal to animals or plants; his dignity is greater and he is charged as creation’s steward. To morally equate the loss of human lives to the loss of “ecosystems” is to see the egalitarian ethic of the sustainable development agenda at work. Surely such thinking is not supported within the parameters of traditional Christian teaching on these matters.

A more authentic interpretation of the biblical notions of stewardship and dominion is to understand these in light of each other. In the first chapter of Genesis, man is given dominion over the earth. Most impor-

tantly, the biblical reference to dominion de-sacralizes the world inasmuch as it tells man that he is more important than trees and animals and therefore he should not worship (as many pagan cultures do) the elements or animals as

divine beings. The third chapter of Genesis, however, also places clear parameters on how man exercises his dominion. It forces man to recall that he cannot do whatever he pleases with the elements and animals, and that he must be prudent in his use of them. This is the real meaning of stewardship, and it has little in common with those religious activists who think that it means that we must treat the whole world as a wilderness park.

The theological reflection employed in the Oxford Declaration is quite superficial. Cloaking a pre-determined activist agenda in a few scriptural quotations fails to satisfy the requirements of serious theological

*“Churches concerned about environmental questions should be wary of closing off the debate by lining up exclusively with one group of scientists and policymakers.”*

study as it pertains to environmental matters. This document is engaging in a facile “me too environmentalism” that ignores the profound insights of the Judeo-Christian tradition, especially as they pertain to such biblical concepts as stewardship and dominion. These two concepts, which are deeply rooted in Christian anthropology, are not likely to please the extreme green activists that often are at the center of these debates. Nowhere in the document are the seminal texts of Genesis 1 and 3 mentioned.

As to the scientific fallacy of the Oxford Declaration—the document simply declares that “human induced climate change” is a fact. On this point, it is important to note that there is mixed opinion within the scientific community as to whether or not long-term global warming is even occurring. There is even greater debate as to how much human activity may contribute to any climate change.

While it is impressive that 78 climate scientists, policy-makers, and religious leaders came together to draft the Oxford Declaration, theirs are not the only voices. There is also a petition circulated by the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine, which states, in part, that “there is no convincing evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gases is causing or will, in the foreseeable future, cause catastrophic heating of the earth’s atmosphere and disruption of the earth’s climate.” Some 17,000 scientists from around the world have signed this document.

Many of the harmful effects of “climate change” mentioned in the Oxford Declaration—diminishing supplies of clean water, an increase in disease, declining agricultural productivity—are due more to lack of economic development, impeding efficient and value-additive human activity. Most developing nations, for instance, do not yet possess the critical infrastructures necessary for sanitation, modern agricultural practices, and efficiently developed sources of affordable energy.

Lacking these critical infrastructures, many developing nations rely on the use of primitive biomass fuels such as dung and wood, and engage in agricultural practices that degrade land quality and pollute water sources. The answer to the environmental degradation in these situations is economic growth and development, not draconian

measures to sustain the present patterns. Every reliable and careful statistical study illustrates that

economic development increases environmental quality and rolls back environmental degradation.

The Oxford Declaration serves as a fine example of the bandwagon effect of the need many Christians feel to “get in” on environmental causes. Churches concerned about environmental questions should be wary of closing off the debate by lining up exclusively with one group of scientists and policymakers. They should be careful not to sign on, or lend moral credibility, to a pre-determined secularist environmental agenda—the foundations of which are quite at odds with orthodox Christian anthropology. In such matters, faith and reason—not political conformity—should be the Christian’s guide.

*Phillip W. De Vos is the public policy manager at the Acton Institute.*



# VIGILANT FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

by Faith McDonnell

*To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven... A time of war, and a time of peace.*

Has the time of peace finally arrived for Sudan? And if it has, the IRD prays that it will be a just peace.

Since the summer of 2002 negotiations for peace have been going on between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). These talks have been held in a forum created by Sudan's neighbors, chaired by Kenya, with the involvement of Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The peace talks have also been supported by the United States, Great Britain, and Norway.

In July 2003 reports began to surface that the two sides were close to signing a preliminary peace agreement. Likely terms included a period of some autonomy for Southern Sudan, with more representation of the South in the national government, and an eventual referendum allowing southerners to determine their political future.

Many questions still remain, though. Will this be a just peace for the people of Southern Sudan? Why has there been no condemnation of Sudanese government violations of the ceasefire agreement, particularly attacks on the villages of Liang and Longochok in Western Upper Nile? What will happen to the Christians still in Northern Sudan? What will become of the Nuba Mountains and other so-called "marginal areas" with ties to both the North and South?

We don't know the answers to these questions, but one thing is sure: IRD's Church Alliance for a New Sudan, and all those who care about human rights and religious freedom in Sudan, must remain

vigilant. We must continue to stand firm to assure that there is just implementation of the peace agreement and that our own government remains engaged. Only our continued involvement and advocacy will keep the U.S. government's attention focused on Sudan after the peace agreement has been signed. It was, after all, grassroots mobilization efforts such as IRD's Sudan vigil that brought about renewed interest in the Sudan Peace Act.

## STAND FIRM: THE VIGIL FOR SUDAN

From September 18 to 24, 2002, CANS sponsored a seven-day public prayer vigil for Sudan. "Stand Firm: the Vigil for Sudan" was held in Galvez Park, adjacent to the U.S. State Department. The title "Stand Firm" was taken from Moses' exhortation in Exodus 14:13: "Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you." The vigil had the following purposes:

- ❖ **Stand before God in supplication and solidarity with the suffering Sudanese.** At the time of the vigil, the radical Islamist government of Sudan and the SPLA/M were preparing for peace talks. Efforts were underway to revive the Sudan Peace Act in Congress. Now, as then, we know that only God can bring freedom and peace to the people of Sudan.
- ❖ **Stand with the persecuted church in Sudan.** Governments and military forces have dominated the conflict in Sudan. By standing with the church in Sudan, the very best of civil society, we become a megaphone through which the church's wise leaders are able to address our own government, the media, and the world.
- ❖ **Stand for sustained engagement by our government.** The vigil served as a witness to our leaders—demanding strong, unflagging, and consistent intervention on behalf of democracy and religious freedom. Soon after the vigil, the Sudan Peace Act was passed in both houses of Congress and signed by President Bush. The act committed the U.S. government to monitoring the Sudanese peace process, holding both sides accountable to their promises. It also held out the prospect of aid for the post-war reconstruction of Southern Sudan.
- ❖ **Stand firm until there is a just peace and religious freedom for all in Sudan.** Finally, we pledge to the Sudanese people our ongoing commitment to their cause. We will not be satisfied with unfulfilled promises. We will not forget them. Just as our Christian brothers and sisters are standing firm, so shall we.

In the months that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Sudan policy analysts agreed that there was a small "window of opportunity" for a just peace in Sudan. Noting the past history of the Sudanese government—signing agreements and then violating them—they urged that diplomatic efforts by the Sudan Special Envoy, former Senator John Danforth, be bolstered by the passage of a strong Sudan Peace Act. What was needed was a large-scale public demonstration to show the commitment of the grassroots community—particularly the churches—to strong U.S. policy on Sudan. CANS agreed to sponsor a prayer vigil for Sudan. Mr.

*Emmanuel Kembe performing his protest music for the CANS-sponsored Prayer Vigil for Sudan.*



Donna Ballard came from Texas to serve as our vigil coordinator, assisted by Midland, City Attorney Chad Weaver and a host of volunteers. Vigil participants came from the DC metropolitan area, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Texas, South Dakota, Washington State, California, and elsewhere across the country.

#### A HOST OF WITNESSES

There were 17 segments of the "Stand Firm" vigil. The first took place at noon on Wednesday, September 18, led by Jenny Guinness, the wife of author Os Guinness. At 5:00 p.m. there was a special "Youngest Advocates Vigil." Dozens of children attended, created prayer chains, wrote greetings to Sudanese children, and signed a sixty-foot long "Rolling Petition for Sudan." They enjoyed exploring the model Sudanese refugee camp erected by Dennis Bennett, the director of Servant's Heart relief ministry to Sudan.

The remaining segments were led by numerous organizations and churches:

- ❖ Thursday's vigils were both led by the Sudanese community in the DC area.
- ❖ On Friday both vigils were sponsored by the American Anti-Slavery Group and Christian Solidarity International (CSI), organizations that work to bring freedom to those who have been enslaved by Sudanese government militias.
- ❖ Youth Day was the theme for Saturday's vigils, with vigils led by the Savior's Alliance for Lifting the Truth. No sooner was the evening vigil concluded, then an all-night vigil began at the Lincoln Memorial. Over 100 college students came to this event, primarily organized by a group from Princeton University.
- ❖ Sunday's noon vigil was a joint effort by professors and seminarians from the Virginia Theological Seminary and Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. On Sunday night, Episcopal parishes in Northern Virginia co-sponsored the vigil.
- ❖ The Monday noon vigil was led by three more Virginia churches. In the evening the Faith in Africa coalition from New York and the church com-

munity in Richmond, VA, that supports Sudanese refugees joined hands to lead the vigil.

- ❖ On the last day of the "Stand Firm" event, the first vigil of the day was a combined effort of a number of Jewish religious and human rights organizations. A second day-time vigil was led by churches and other representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention. And the last of the vigils was sponsored by the Midland, TX, Ministerial Alliance.

Several members of Congress told us that our vigil raised the profile of this issue, helped put momentum behind the Sudan Peace Act, and put extra pressure on the Sudanese government to negotiate for peace. Senators Sam Brownback and Arlen Specter and U.S. Representatives Frank Wolf, Dave Weldon, and Donald Payne spoke at the vigil. A number of congressional wives also showed their support by joining with the Sudanese women at the vigil. Other House members made floor speeches about the vigil during the debate on the Sudan Peace Act.

#### STILL STANDING FIRM

The act was signed into law by President Bush on October 21, 2002. Many of the groups that participated in the CANS

vigil were invited to the White House to join congressional leaders for the signing ceremony. Before taking his pen, President Bush thanked those present for their hard work to bring peace and justice to Sudan. "I will not forget Sudan," he assured the group, adding dryly, "And if I do, I know that you will prod me."

Forgetting Sudan does not seem to be a problem. The U.S. State Department has been the key player in encouraging both parties in the peace process. But some are still worried that State has been too accommodating to the Sudanese government, overlooking blatant violations of the cease-fire agreement. They worry that the Sudanese government may not keep its word, even if it does sign a peace agreement. This is a regime against which the Sudan Peace Act made a formal finding of genocide and required an investigation of the war crimes it has committed, such as slavery, aerial bombings of civilian targets, and manipulation of food aid.

Those of us who care about the Sudanese who have suffered and died for so long must continue to stand firm. We must ensure that our brothers and sisters receive sufficient justice in this peace to have a real opportunity for religious freedom, the development of civil society, and a democratic New Sudan. ✚



Steven Wonda (left) of the Southern Sudanese community, and Faith McDonnell (right) director of Religious Liberty Programs at IRD, present Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) with a map of Sudan signed by the Lost Boys of Sudan in recognition of Brownback's passionate activism on behalf of the Southern Sudanese.

# GOD'S VISION FOR HIS CHURCH

by Meghan Graham

**D**o you have a vision of God's vision for your life?" Dr. Jerry Kirk posed this question at the "Confessing the Faith" conference held last October in Indianapolis, IN. I believe this question was what this conference was all about, God's vision for our lives and for our denominations.

God was present at the conference, guiding and teaching us about the future of our churches. While we came as United Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians, we worshiped, prayed, and listened as one in the Body of Christ. Each of us was concerned about the troubles in his or her own denomination, but determined to work for change, knowing God desires to redeem His Church. The conference was a remarkable experience for all who attended.

I was privileged to bring to the conference with me a group of four college students from my church to experience church reform first-hand.

This conference was a real eye-opener for them. They were surprised to find out the how serious the problems that plague the Church are and that these problems are in all the mainline denominations.

However, they were also encouraged. They heard Dr. Tom Oden's speech stating that God has not abandoned the mainline and calling us to remain in these historic denominations. Diane Knippers also gave a speech reminding us that reform is not something we do so that we can get on with the normal activity of the church, but rather, reform is part of the mission of the church. She encouraged the "next generation" to continue the reform, calling them "young Turks," and encouraging them to follow in the footsteps of such reformers as Athanasius.

These students were also able to attend seminars. One such seminar, led by Jerald Walz and Melissa Bixler, was entitled "Don't let the mainline flat line." In this seminar Jerald and Melissa discussed their experiences in church reform and why they feel it is important to involve generation Xers.

A highlight for the college students was a chance to sit down with Dean Peter Moore of the Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and Dean Robert Munday of Nashota House. They talked openly about issues in the Episcopal Church and what to expect at General Convention this year. They also expressed their hopes for the future



Several young Episcopalians talk about the possibility of going to seminary with Dean Peter Moore of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry (far right, top), and Dean Robert Munday of Nashota House (far right, bottom, partially obscured), at the Confessing the Faith conference.

of the Church. One of the college students, who is seriously considering seminary, was encouraged by this talk with Dean Moore, realizing that there are good seminaries that are preparing young priests for church renewal. It was a great learning experience for all.

After their experience at the "Confessing the Faith" conference and their talk with Deans Moore and Munday, these students were ready to go to General Convention. They want to make their opinions known and take part in church reform. Since they are the church of the future, it is their job to fight for the future of the church. They want to dispel the rumors

that young people are liberal and are all for discarding biblical and traditional teachings. They are ready to take responsibility for their church and for its future.

God wants to redeem His Church. And it is a privilege to be a part of His plan of reform. So, now is the time for reform. Much work needs to be done. To quote Dr. Kirk again, it is time to "get changed, get together, and get going!"

