

faith & freedom

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REFLECTIONS ON THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL & POLITICAL WITNESS

Within Global Christianity, Episcopal Church Sidelines Itself

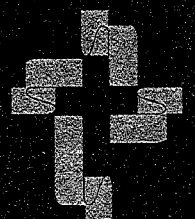
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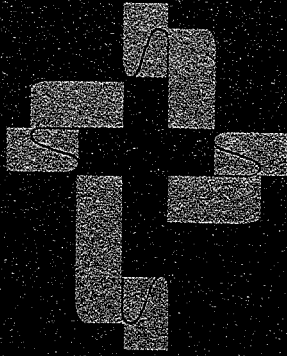
The Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kwashi, Anglican Bishop of Jos, Nigeria proclaiming the Gospel at an orthodox Anglican conference in Dallas, Texas.

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

A 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 (CANS) and the Liberty Initiative for North Korea (LINK).

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

We agree 100 percent with your article "Failing the Test of Faith" in the summer 2003 edition of *Faith & Freedom*. There are many unanswered questions regarding global warming. We feel that religious organizations should not be involved on this controversial problem until all questions are scientifically and unquestionably answered.

— Robert and Anita Hale
Coos Bay, OR

The ECUSA has now decided to go its own way, deluding and diminishing itself thinking that it is the avant garde of the "new Anglicanism of the future." But, in truth, the ECUSA has withdrawn from the larger body of Christendom. And has identified with secular relativistic thinking—an island to itself in isolation. It is treading a course which has cut across the dynamic of the Gospel that will lead into irrelevance.

— The Rev. Allan Bond
Sarasota, FL

I want to express my appreciation for "Guidelines for Christian-Muslim Dialogue". My mission group found the guidelines to be thoughtful and helpful in our efforts to extend a hand of friendship to Arabs and Arab Muslims in our community.

Since 9/11, we have felt God called us to be His light and witness by extending a hand of friendship to Arabs in our community who are the targets of unjust discrimination and harassment. In times of darkness, we felt Jesus' way to reaching beyond ethnic and religious boundaries was the most constructive means to respond to 9/11.

This call was prompted, in part, by past discrimination faced by many members of our congregation during World War II when Japanese Americans were imprisoned in internment camps. As a Christian church with Japanese American roots and tradition, we felt God had uniquely placed us in a position to make a statement loudly for the way of Jesus by extending hands of friendship to Arabs in our community.

Our journey has been rich. We have built many friendships. Through our dialogues with Arabs many members of our congregation have told their story of internment, some for the very first time. Expressing stories of sadness, pain, and memories of those who extended unwarranted grace, has brought about healing. In addition, the stories have prompted many to voice concerns over the discrimination faced by Arabs in America. There is a growing sense that perhaps God is using this painful time in the history of our church to position ourselves to be a voice of credibility and advocacy, and a hand of friendship.

Through this time, we have struggled [with] how these interactions with our new found Muslim friends should be conducted in the context of our Christian theology. Your guidelines will be useful as we pursue this dialogue.

— John Okamoto
via e-mail

[The IRD's Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Guide for Churches is available on the IRD website (www.ird-renew.org) or in brochure form from our Washington office. ED.]

Photos

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Embracing Truth and Unity



by Diane Knippers

The IRD was recently featured in a front-page story in *The New York Times* – a story that was picked up in other newspapers around the country. I don't mind telling you I was a bit nervous when I learned that such an article was about to appear. *The New York Times* doesn't have a reputation for being sympathetic to conservative-leaning organizations.

Nevertheless, in spite of a few errors, we were pleased with the article. (You can access the article and our corrections on our website – www.ird-renew.org.)

Here's my favorite line of the article: "Although the [IRD] has an annual budget of just less than \$1 million and a staff of fewer than a dozen, liberals and conservatives alike say it is having an outsized effect on the dynamics of American politics by counteracting the liberal influence of the mainline Protestant churches" [emphasis added].

That's certainly one of our goals. The IRD's purpose is to reform and renew the social and political witness of the U.S. churches. Sometimes that does mean counteracting the negative witness of the liberal denominational leaders.

The article also noted a growing discussion of separation or secession in the mainline denominations. Splitting churches has never been IRD's goal. But sadly, the Times did accurately capture a current reality—there is more talk now about splitting than I can remember in my 30-plus years working in church renewal.

But why now? And why is it the issue of homosexuality that prompts such talk? When you consider all the differences we live with in the historic Protestant churches, why not live with this one?

One answer came to me when I recalled the 1988 General Conference of the United Methodist Church. A previous General Conference had adopted a stance of "doctrinal pluralism"—a position that was increasingly used to justify "anything-goes" theology. In 1988, theologically orthodox Methodists successfully persuaded the General Conference to affirm a clear doctrinal statement, replacing "pluralism" with the "primacy of scripture." At the same time, the Conference adopted a plethora of very liberal political statements.

What struck me following that General Conference was the fact that almost everyone went home happy.

More conservative folks got what they wanted—a stronger theological statement. Conservatives tend to define the core of their religion around doctrinal points. More liberal folks got what they wanted as well—a broad spectrum of left-leaning political

statements. Liberals tend to define the core of their religion around social and political advocacy. The result may not have been peaceful co-existence. But it was co-existence.

Then along came the sexuality debates. Liberals see homosexuality primarily through social justice/political lenses. Conservatives see the acceptance of homosexuality as overthrowing the authority of Scripture—a key doctrinal point. This debate impinges on the core-faith identities of both sides.

Over recent decades, the differences between these two "faith identities" or two "religions" have become more stark. Those on one side or the other will often admit to having more in common with fellow conservatives/liberals in other denominations than with those in the opposite camp in their own church.

Still, that doesn't mean we are heading toward a dramatic showdown, with our denominations splitting down the middle or enduring multiple fractures. The situation is quite complex and varies from denomination to denomination. One possibility is that we will simply see a continuation of the hemorrhage of members—the loss of millions of members over the last four decades.

There will undoubtedly be a re-alignment of the Anglican Communion that will have a dramatic effect on the Episcopal Church. This is a result of the schismatic actions of the Episcopal General Convention last summer, decisions on sexuality that shocked and offended the vast majority of Anglicans around the world. Conservative Episcopalians who want to remain in full unity with the wider Anglican Communion will necessarily distance themselves from the Episcopal Church.

At the same time, strong majorities in some of the other denominations—including the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—continue to uphold biblical teaching on sexuality. Indeed, an analysis of the 2004 UM General Convention shows a healthy trend toward greater affirmation of marriage as the union of a man and a woman. "Separation" in those denominations may simply be providing a way for the liberal dissident minorities—minorities that refuse to submit to church law and teaching—to exit their denominations and freely practice their faith in other institutions. My sense is that conservatives in those denominations are willing to be gracious—seeking an amicable solution that would allow dissident congregations to leave with their property, for example. (So far, the liberal "winners" in the Episcopal Church do not seem to evidence such generosity. Hopefully, that will change.)

Sometimes conservatives are accused of undermining Christian unity. But on the issue of marriage and sexuality, conservatives are the ones who are committed to Christian unity. We are the ones who will stand with the whole body of Christ around the world and across the generations. The big lie is assuming that Christians must choose between truth and unity. Truth and unity are the two essential sides of the same coin. Genuine unity protects truth. Genuine truth defines our unity. Christ prayed that his followers be one. Our prayer—our calling and our intentions—can be no less.

Churches Respond to Iraq Prison Scandal

by Alan F.H. Wisdom

Amidst international outcry over U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners in a Baghdad prison, two prominent U.S. oldline Protestant bodies have released public statements. The National Council of Churches (NCC) issued an "ecumenical pastoral letter" calling for "a change of course in Iraq." The May 11 NCC letter, signed by 17 top oldline officials, urged the U.S. government "to turn over the transition of authority and post-war reconstruction to the United Nations..."

Also on May 11, the United Methodist Council of Bishops passed a resolution that "laments the continued warfare by the United States and coalition forces" in Iraq. Praying "for a swift end to the destruction and violence raging in Iraq," the bishops requested "the United Nations... establish a legitimate transitional government of Iraq to maintain the peace and safeguard sustainable development efforts."

Both statements made brief mention of the prisoner abuse scandal. The NCC letter spoke of how "the horrific pictures of prisoner abuse" have "brought home to all Americans and indeed the world" the council's "profound concern at the direction this cycle of violence is taking us." It asserted that "current U.S. foreign policy...is not aligned" with the "guiding principle" of "build[ing] up the whole, interdependent human family and promot[ing] reconciliation whenever possible." According to the NCC leaders, "Many people see our policy as one based on protection of our country's economic interests narrowly defined, rather than on principles of human rights and justice..." They warned that "current policy is dangerous for America and the world and will only lead to further violence." The council's solution to the "cycle of violence" was to hand Iraq off to the United Nations.

Signatories of the NCC letter included: Bishop Melvin Talbert, on behalf of the United Methodist Council of Bishops; Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold of the Episcopal Church; the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Archbishop Demetrios, the Greek Orthodox primate in America; the Rev. John Thomas, President of the United Church of Christ; and other top denominational and NCC officials. The positions espoused in the letter went well beyond what had been endorsed by

the highest legislative bodies of the various denominations. For example, there was no resolution passed at either the recent General Conference of the United Methodist Church, or the 2003 Episcopal General Convention, or the 2003 Presbyterian General Assembly naming the United Nations as the body best suited to run Iraq. But this lack of denominational direction apparently did not deter Talbert, Griswold, or Kirkpatrick.

The United Methodist Council of Bishops employed reasoning and rhetoric similar to the NCC's. "The cycle of violence in which the United States is engaged has created a context for the denigration of human dignity and gross violations of human rights of Iraqi prisoners of war," the council contended. The bishops regretted that "the continuing loss of Iraqi civilian lives, especially children, and the increasing death toll among United States, coalition military and civilian personnel in Iraq grieves the heart of God." They claimed that "the premises advanced by the United States government for engaging in this war, namely, the presumption of weapons of mass destruction and alleged connection between Al Qaeda and Iraq have not been verified." They, too, looked to the United Nations to step in and bring peace to Iraq.

It is curious that neither the NCC nor the Methodist

bishops had more than a single phrase to say about prisoner abuse. The enormity of that scandal would seem to demand a fuller response. What happened in Abu Ghraib prison was truly shocking, because America and the world had reason to expect better from U.S. soldiers.

The abuse of the Iraqi prisoners went far beyond cultural insensitivity, far beyond lack of training and supervision, far beyond an over-reaction to stress—far beyond all the excuses that have been offered to mitigate the offense. It was a betrayal of the God-given dignity that all persons have in themselves and must recognize in others. It was a betrayal of a soldier's duty to fight wars within moral limits regarding both combatants and non-combatants. It was a betrayal of the U.S. mission to rid Iraq of a dangerous dictator and set it on a road toward some closer approximation of liberal democracy.

Is it possible that the NCC and the Methodist bishops did not express the same level of outrage because they did not share the same high expectations for U.S. soldiers? Perhaps they saw the soldiers as mere cogs in an inhuman "cycle of violence." Perhaps,



Abu Ghraib prison as U.S. soldiers found it, with a portrait of Saddam Hussein that prisoners were forced to paint.

from their quasi-pacifist perspective, they did not believe that wars could be fought within moral limits or for moral purposes. The NCC apparently did not perceive any possibility for a noble U.S. mission in Iraq. It saw only a selfish policy "based on protection of our country's economic interests narrowly defined." Consequently, the NCC and Methodist bishops may not have felt the same sense of betrayal that many church members are now feeling.

The leftist evangelical Jim Wallis, a favorite guest participant in NCC delegations, evinces in a recent column the jaded perspective that may explain the council's attitude:

Such abuse and atrocities are the consequence of war, and especially military occupation. They always have been, and they will continue to be. In Vietnam, a brutal American war and occupation created bloody insurrection. Viet Cong fighters did terrible things to American soldiers, and, in turn, the soldiers did terrible things to Vietnamese civilians. It is simply the cycle of violence.

Neither the NCC nor the Methodist bishops recommended any practical measures that might be taken to correct the prisoner abuse scandal. Their statements did not consider how the U.S. government might take responsibility for the situation, hold the abusers accountable, and prevent repetition of the abuses.

The sole remedy that the NCC and the Methodist bishops prescribed for all the ills in Iraq was "Turn the country over to the United Nations." This is not a serious policy proposal. Nobody familiar with the UN could imagine it capable, by itself, of bringing order to a nation as vast, fractious, and violent as Iraq. This task, if it can be accomplished at all, requires credible military force to restrain those who sow disorder. The UN, however, does not have an army. It relies upon member states to supply their own forces.

Thus far, only two nations have been willing to send sizeable military forces into Iraq: the United States and Great Britain. There is no reason to believe that, even with a fresh UN mandate, other countries would volunteer to send large numbers of their troops into harm's way. In fact, it is not clear

that UN officials themselves are willing to risk a major commitment to Iraq.

Certainly, the UN may be able to make some contributions to the reconstruction of Iraq. It is already involved in Iraq's interim government. But, ultimately, the greatest responsibility will rest upon those who can deploy overwhelming force. Today and for the foreseeable future, that means the United States and Great Britain.

Even the UN's greatest supposed advantage, its "legitimacy," may be overrated. It is not evident that the forces now attacking U.S. troops—the Shiite militia of Moqtada Sadr, the diehard Ba'athists, and the foreign al Qaeda fighters—will show greater deference to an organization with headquarters in New York. They may well reject it as just another Western, non-Muslim occupying power.

Nor is it obvious that UN control would bring an end to human rights abuses such as those in Abu Ghraib prison. Troops on UN missions have themselves been accused of perpetrating or permitting major human rights abuses—for example, in Bosnia. Because many UN members are not themselves democracies, the organization cannot be counted as the strongest champion of liberal democracy. And when the UN has been implicated in abuses, it has demonstrated far less accountability than we are likely to see from the U.S. military.

So, despite the fondest wishes of the NCC and the Methodist bishops, the UN does not offer a real alternative to the U.S. occupation in Iraq. There seem to be only two alternatives: Either the United States and its coalition allies can stay in Iraq, perhaps altering some tactics as they gradually transfer power to a new Iraqi government. Or they can withdraw their troops, leaving 25 million Iraqis to the mercy of whichever militia is able to prevail in battle.

The advice from the NCC and the Methodist bishops provides little help in choosing between those two alternatives. American Christians need to consider a set of questions that the oldline Protestant leaders are not even raising:

- Which kind of government would best secure stability inside Iraq, peace with its neighbors, and protection for Iraqi minorities (including Iraqi Christians)? Should we continue to aim for a secular federal republic, with majority

rule and minority rights? Or is there some other kind of system that should be imposed upon Iraq?

- If democracy is the objective in Iraq, who has the power to maintain the kind of order that would be required to hold free and fair elections throughout the country? If not U.S. and coalition troops, who else would be the guarantor of such elections?
- Who are the forces that are attacking U.S. soldiers and civilians in Iraq? What are their objectives? Would it be just to allow them to achieve their objectives? Or must they be resisted by force?
- Do the majority of the Iraqi people want U.S. and coalition forces to withdraw rapidly from Iraq? Do vulnerable minorities, such as the Kurds and Christians, wish the troops to be withdrawn?
- If coalition forces pulled out suddenly, what would happen inside Iraq? What would be the international effect? Would "rogue" states such as North Korea and Iran be more tractable, or less so?

The NCC and the Methodist bishops would have served church members better by grappling humbly with these kinds of questions. Instead they have offered quick and easy answers. In March, 2003, their easy answer was: No to war! Today their easy answer is: Let the UN save the day!

We in the IRD would not pretend to offer an easy answer to the situation in Iraq. We do not find any such answer in the Scriptures. Unlike the NCC and the Methodist bishops, we did not believe that the morality of the Iraq war was an easy call in March 2003 — nor that it is a settled matter today. We can only join fellow citizens in sober conversation, and fellow Christians in earnest prayer. Our petition is that we and our national leaders might receive a special measure of godly prudence and patience, so as to find paths toward justice, freedom, and peace in Iraq. We are convinced that such conversations and prayers are likely to bring more benefit to the prisoners in Abu Ghraib, and to all Iraqis, than any easy answers in church press releases. ✚

Homosexual Episcopal Bishop Not the Future of Christianity

by Mark Tooley

The Episcopal Church in America has elected what is perhaps the first openly homosexual bishop in a major Christian denomination. Did the November 2003 consecration of the Rev. Gene Robinson as New Hampshire's new Episcopal bishop, a ceremony which Robinson's male lover proudly attended, presage acceptance of homosexual conduct in other Christian churches?

Probably not. Contrary to frequent public perceptions, almost no major denominations, even the most liberal, formally approve of homosexual relations. The relatively rare ordinations of practicing homosexuals and celebrations of same-sex unions generally occur in violation of national denominational standards—or in “gray areas” that those standards leave to the discretion of local churches.

There are at least 152 million members of Christian churches in the United States. The vast majority are in churches where there is little to no possibility, even in the long-term, of any reconsideration of Christianity's historic teaching reserving sexual intimacy for the marriage of man and woman. The Episcopal Church has just over 2 million members.

Debates over homosexuality within the U.S. Christian community are largely confined to the liberal-led oldline Protestant denominations: the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptist Churches, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the United Church of Christ.

The combined membership of these denominations comprises only about 15 percent of American Christianity. And even among these liberal-led bodies, the largest of them—the United Methodists (eight million members), Evangelical Lutherans (five million), and Presbyterians (three million)—have maintained prohibitions against practicing homosexual clergy. So too have

the American Baptists (over one million members). Among the Methodists and Presbyterians, the majorities upholding these policies have actually increased in recent years.

The Disciples of Christ (800,000 members) and the United Church of Christ (over 1 million) are often counted as pro-homosexual. But the reality is more complicated. Because the UCC and Disciples are decentralized, they have never had explicit national standards for acceptable sexual conduct. Some local congregations have taken the initiative to ordain practicing homosexuals and celebrate same-sex unions. But these congregations remain the exception rather than the rule. Despite vociferous encouragement from national UCC agencies, fewer than 500 of the 6,000 UCC congregations have officially declared themselves

to be “open and affirming” of homosexuality.

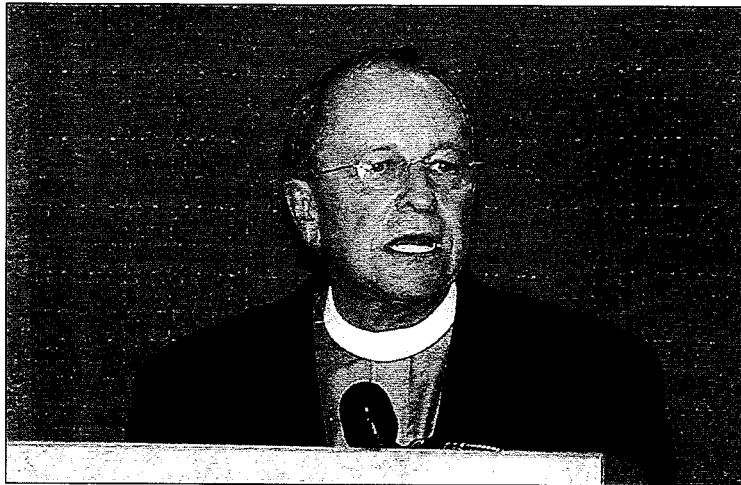
A similar situation has prevailed in the Episcopal Church for about the last 15 years. Liberal bishops and local Episcopal dioceses ordained homosexual clergy as they saw fit, although not authorized by the church's General Convention.

Even the final vote at the Episcopal General Convention confirming the election of Gene Robinson was hardly overwhelming. Forty-three bishops voted against him, as opposed to 62 voting in favor. U.S. Episcopal traditionalists are now gathering support

from overseas Anglican bishops who vigorously oppose any acceptance of homosexual practice.

What is likely to emerge is a realignment of the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion. The liberal rump of the U.S. Episcopal Church will become significantly smaller in membership and poorer financially, as well as estranged to some degree from the growing Anglican churches of Africa and Asia. This result hardly will encourage other denominations to follow the Episcopal Church's example on homosexuality.

Few will be tempted, in any case. The vast majority of America's churches adhere to traditional Christian teachings about sex and marriage. An ecumenical spokesman for the U.S. Catholic



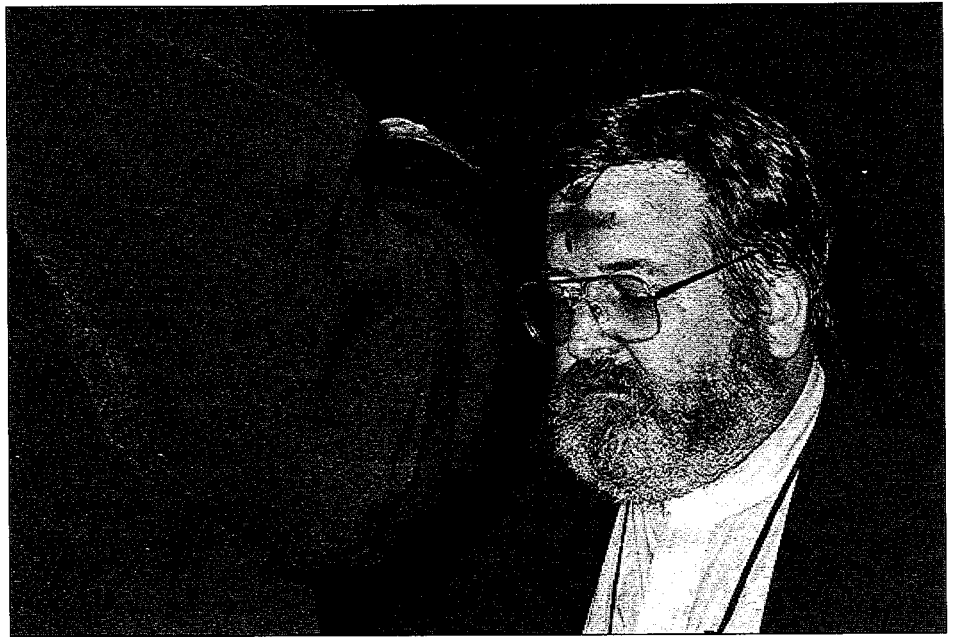
V. Gene Robinson, at the press conference immediately following the August 2003 General Convention vote. His consecration as bishop has had reverberations throughout worldwide Christianity.

bishops said the Episcopal Church's decision "reflects a departure from the common understanding of the meaning and purpose of human sexuality and the morality of homosexual activity as found in sacred Scripture and the Christian tradition." Bishop Stephen Blaize said Gene Robinson's election would have "serious implications in the search for Christian unity and for the work of our bilateral Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States."

The chief ethicist for the Southern Baptist Convention, Richard Land, was more blunt. "People who are engaging in sexually deviant behavior should not be in positions of leadership in the churches," Land said. "The vultures of theological liberalism have now come home to roost in the mainline denominations," Land warned. "These Episcopal Church leaders are embracing the deadly theology that says parts of Scripture are inspired and parts are not." Southern Baptists, with 16 million members, are the largest Protestant denomination in America.

The president of the 2.6-million-member Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod sounded a similar theme. "This action ... constitutes a momentous break from the Christian Church's 2000-year-long understanding of what the Holy Scriptures teach about homosexual behavior as contrary to God's will and the biblical qualifications for holding the pastoral office," said the Rev. Gerald Kieschnick. He added that the election "will undoubtedly provoke controversy throughout all of Christendom."

The leading bishops of Eastern Orthodoxy in America, representing about 5 million members, also issued a recent statement reaffirming their stance. The nine top bishops comprising the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the Americas said that they were "deeply concerned about recent developments regarding 'same sex unions.'" They asserted, "Neither Scripture nor Holy Tradition blesses or sanctions such a union between persons of the same sex."



The Rev. Dr. Kendall Harmon, Canon Theologian of the Diocese of South Carolina, receiving ashes shortly after the vote confirming V. Gene Robinson as Bishop Co-adjutor of the Diocese of New Hampshire. Harmon and other opponents of the confirmation received the ashes as a sign of repentance and mourning for the actions of General Convention.

The Orthodox bishops regretted that the "divine purpose" for marriage was being challenged "even within some faith communities" as political pressures work to normalize same-sex unions. "The Orthodox Church cannot and will not bless same-sex unions," they

the traditional teachings limiting sexual relationships to marriage.

Many leaders of the Episcopal Church, with their allies in other liberal-led denominations, like to style themselves as harbingers of America's religious future. But in fact the Episcopal Church is almost

Debates over homosexuality within the U.S. Christian community are largely confined to the liberal-led oldline Protestant denominations...the combined membership of which is only about 15 percent of American Christianity.

insisted emphatically. "Like adultery and fornication, homosexual acts are condemned by Scripture."

Besides the Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, and Orthodox, there are thousands of Evangelical churches in America for whom homosexuality is also an issue of no compromise. Nor is there much sign of a widespread pro-homosexual movement among churches historically identified with African-Americans and other ethnic minorities. Internationally, demographics among Christian churches are even less favorable to any acceptance of homosexuality. Outside of a few Western European Protestant denominations, it is hard to find much support for jettisoning

a unique case: unusually wealthy, unusually captive to the fashions of America's cultural elites, with a long history of disdain for lower-class Christians who are more "dogmatic" in their doctrines and more "enthusiastic" in their pursuit of a holy life. Surveys show that even their closest mainline cousins—the Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians—are markedly more conservative than Episcopalians in their beliefs and morals.

So it may be a rather small procession that follows behind the pro-homosexual Episcopal bishops. Far from the being the vanguard of a new Christendom, they may prove to be a small minority of stragglers that has turned aside to chase the dreams of yesterday's sexual revolution.

Desert Dictatorship Tests U.S. Commitment to Freedom

by Lawrence A. Uzzell

An obscure desert dictatorship now poses a crucial test of America's commitment to international religious freedom. Turkmenistan, tucked between the Caspian Sea and Afghanistan, ranks with North Korea as one of the world's most vicious persecutors of religion. In some ways it oppresses Christians and Muslims even more today than when it was part of the Soviet Union. But Washington is reluctant to voice that truth.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act requires the State Department to maintain a list of "countries of particular concern." These are the regimes that most flagrantly violate the religious liberties outlined in pacts such as the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. The list now includes Burma, China, Iran, North Korea and Sudan—while other unfree countries such as Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan are omitted.

Cynics believe that Washington uses "human rights" only as an opportunistic slogan against its enemies. Remote Turkmenistan is morally important at this point precisely because it is not an enemy of the United States. It does not foment international terrorism or produce weapons of mass destruction. What it does is treat its own people like dirt.

Turkmenistan's "president for life" Saparmurat Niyazov was its Communist boss when it was still a Soviet Socialist Republic. He has succeeded in retaining power by re-labeling himself as a nationalist—and has launched a uniquely grotesque cult of personality.

A key element of that cult is his "vanity Scriptures," entitled "Rukhnama" and authored by the dictator himself. Niyazov's sycophants proclaim this so-called "holy book," consisting mostly of egocentric reflections and platitudes, to be "on par with the Bible and the Koran." The authorities mandate its intensive study at every grade level from elementary school through university, while curtailing other subjects such as mathematics. They require mosques to display and venerate it alongside the Koran. Russian Orthodox priests have been pressured to teach from "Rukhnama" during their worship services. In short, Niyazov's officials are forcing pious Sunni Muslims and Orthodox Christians to commit blasphemy.

Apart from those two faiths, every other religion is in effect illegal. In the year 2000 I visited a Baptist congregation in Turkmenistan's capital which had been legally registered even during the Soviet years; its prayer house has since been confiscated and its members threatened

with criminal penalties if they persist in meeting for worship in each other's homes. An Adventist pastor showed me the ruins of what had been his flock's church. Six months earlier it had been razed to the ground by municipal bulldozers—the first time since the Brezhnev years that state officials deliberately destroyed a place of Christian worship anywhere in the former Soviet Union.

While Protestant Christianity has been driven completely underground, Roman Catholics have just one parish—whose priests have immunity as Vatican City diplomats. The Armenian Apostolic Church has not been allowed to revive any of its pre-Soviet parishes which used to serve Turkmenistan's large Armenian minority. The Shiite Muslim minority has not one functioning mosque.

The two above-ground religions are in effect run by the state. An official of Turkmenistan's council for religious affairs told me in an unguarded moment that it makes the personnel decisions for Russian Orthodox parishes and Sunni mosques, hiring and firing priests and imams.

In March Niyazov issued a decree ostensibly loosening restrictions on religious minorities—hoping to influence the U.S. State Department's

pending decision on whether to label Turkmenistan a "country of particular concern." But it is now clear that nothing important has changed in practice.

Only two small groups—the Bahais and the Adventists, with fewer than 500 members combined—have been granted registration. Even registered congregations are banned from holding any worship service for which they are not granted specific permission in advance.

Designation as a "country of particular concern" does not automatically trigger concrete sanctions such as trade embargoes. The U.S. retains discretion to balance economic or military concerns with human-rights issues, as it obviously does for China. The label's importance is that the world's most powerful government chooses to tell the truth rather than help cover up tyranny. And the truth has a force of its own, inspiring the persecuted and shaming the persecutors.

Honestly labeling Turkmenistan would send a strong signal to nearby U.S. allies such as Pakistan and Uzbekistan. Conversely, if Washington's reluctance to tell the truth continues, repressive states worldwide will conclude that they face no serious penalty for trampling on religion. The stakes are high indeed.

Mr. Uzzell is president of International Religious Freedom Watch, www.internationalreligiousfreedomwatch.org.



U.S. CHURCHES REACT TO HOMOSEXUAL "MARRIAGE"

As a result of a mandate from four state supreme court justices in the *Goodridge* case, Massachusetts became the first state in the union to legally issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

The state's Roman Catholic bishops and a large coalition of African-American pastors in Boston have responded by strongly speaking out against same-sex "marriage." The African-American pastors attacked equations of current homosexual rights struggles with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The denomination-wide assemblies of the United Methodist Church and the Church of God in Christ have recently adopted statements strongly opposing same-sex "marriage."

On the other side, the "Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry" has launched a public relations campaign to trumpet its support for the "fundamental human right" of people to have their homosexual relationship recognized as a "marriage." According to the Boston Herald, the group will "fight the perception that all religious groups agree on gay marriage." The roughly 450 endorsing clergy are heavily concentrated within Unitarian Universalism, the United Church of Christ, Reform Judaism, and the Episcopal Church. On May 17, the first day the court ruling took effect, the Rev. William Sinkford, President of the 220,000-member Unitarian Universalist Association, presided over the ceremony of the *Goodridge* plaintiffs, in which guests sang, "Here come the brides! So gay with pride!"

NCC BOARD PLANS BUDGET, PARTISAN POLITICS

The Executive Board of the National Council of Churches (NCC) had its quarterly board meeting in Chicago on May 16-18. Board members expressed general satisfaction with the NCC's current financial condition, but planned for ways to increase revenues. There seemed to be a concerted effort to modify the church council's activities to better match the goals of the organizations whose money it seeks. The NCC has already received significant pledges from the secular pro-abortion, left-wing groups MoveOn.org and USAction, as well as ice cream guru Ben Cohen, actress Vanessa Redgrave, and singer Peter Dinklage. The NCC is looking to the

Sierra Club and anti-Bush billionaire George Soros for additional funds.

Board members reported at length on recent NCC political activism, which has largely consisted of very outspoken denunciation of the Bush administration policies in such areas as Iraq, the War on Terror, and the environment. They also discussed their ambitious plans for influencing the 2004 elections, working for increased voter "education" and turnout—concentrating on portions of the electorate that tend to vote heavily Democratic—and partnering with partisan secular activist groups.

The board also reported on NCC activities with leaders of other religions, including joint worship services. Rothang Chhange of the American Baptist Churches denounced "evangelicals" who hold the "exclusivist" view that "Jesus is the only way." None of the board members spoke to defend the "exclusivist" view.

MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS ORGANIZE "ADVOCACY DAYS"

A coalition of mainline Protestant denominations and church-related political lobbies organized an "Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice" conference in Washington, DC, last March. Some 500-600 participants were exhorted by the official speakers to fight such evils as classism, war, U.S. foreign policy, the Bush administration, homophobia, religious "exclusionism," and tax cuts.

The political tone was decidedly far-left and partisan. The roster of official speakers included someone from the Executive Committee of the Democratic National Committee, a liberal Democratic congressman, an aide to another liberal Democratic congressman, and a former Clinton Administration official. NCC head Bob Edgar frequently referred to his previous career as one of the "most liberal" Democratic congressmen. Jim Winkler of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society claimed that the world would be a "paradise" if the U.S. had diverted all of its military spending during the Cold War to social welfare programs.

When participants were sent to lobby members of Congress on the closing day, Edgar told them that they were not representing themselves, but "the whole of the ecumenical movement."



Bob Edgar, President of the NCC, at its May board meeting. The NCC reported that it received \$100,000 from the partisan left-wing group MoveOn.org, best known for its advertisement equating President Bush with Hitler.

MEMORIAL DAY, NCC-STYLE

On May 27 the National Council of Churches sponsored an "interfaith memorial service" at a Washington, DC, church, honoring those who have died in the conflict in Iraq. According to the liturgy posted on the NCC website, participants mourned the loss of "vibrant lives suddenly and shamelessly sacrificed." They prayed, "For all the deaths that have been justified by turning the love of God or country into fanatical arrogance, we lift up the ashes of our shame, O God." They confessed "our addiction to weapons and the ways of militarism," as well as "the ways we cast blame and create enemies."

There was no sense in the service that the United States and the Iraqi people might have real enemies that mean them ill. Nor was there any sense that Americans and Iraqis who have died fighting those enemies offered their lives for a noble cause. The implication of the NCC liturgy was that all this sacrifice was "shameless," needless, and useless.

The NCC service mixed clergy and scripture readings from Christianity and four other religions. An Eastern Orthodox prayer glorifying God "Who has trodden down death, destroying the power of the devil" was followed by a reading of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, which promise "the cessation of suffering" through stifling all human "thirst or craving." Jesus was mentioned only once in the eight pages of printed liturgy.

About 50 people attended the DC service. The NCC website listed similar services in 24 other locations. ✚

Why Defending Marriage Is Social Justice

by Erik Nelson

Here is a simple, stunning fact: by the time children reach adulthood in our nation, approximately 50 percent of them will have spent some time outside of an intact family. According to W. Bradford Wilcox, a social scientist at the University of Virginia, these children are significantly more likely than those in intact families to experience a variety of social ills: poverty, psychological problems and abuse.

For example, girls in single-parent homes are 150 percent more likely to become pregnant and have out-of-wedlock babies than those in intact two-parent families. They will also experience 92 percent more marital breakup themselves than girls raised in two-parent families. Seventy percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from single-parent homes.

This evidence flies in the face of social conventions regarding divorce, family breakup, cohabitation, etc., which imply that children in these situations are "doing fine." Much of the conventional wisdom in the 1980s tried to show that rising rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births posed essentially no threat to the well being of children.

The newest social science data indicate otherwise. Divorce, once portrayed as a means for women to escape family dysfunction, often exchanges one set of problems for another. When marriages fail, women and children suffer. When those children grow up, they are more likely to continue in the same cycle of social dysfunction: poverty, promiscuity, disease, out-of-wedlock birth, and drug abuse. And the responsibility for dealing with those ills is disproportionately assigned to mothers.

The cohabitation model of relationships is also a failure. Few single men become dependable fathers, and thus unwed mothers are unlikely to enjoy the benefits of shared parenthood responsibilities and finances. As a result, the cohabitation relationship often leads not to equality but to the feminization of both parenting and poverty.

You might think that American churches would be alarmed by this information. But the mainline Protestant churches seem oblivious to this reality. The reason is that, at least so far, most mainline churches have largely been immune from the most detrimental effects of cohabitation and divorce. Why is this?

Class. The Protestant mainline is largely a middle and upper middle class social group whose socio-economic prosperity shields it from many of the problems that accompany marriage breakup. On the other hand, the effect among the poor, and particularly minorities, is disastrous. By the age of 30, 80 percent of white women have married, while only 45 percent of African-American women have. Among marriages whose wives were high school graduates, 32 percent ended by the tenth year of marriage. Only 18 percent of marriages by college-educated

women ended at the same time. Of children born in the early 1990s, non-Hispanic whites will spend on average 80 percent of their childhood in a married couple household. Yet Hispanic children will spend only 67 percent, and African American children only 16 percent, of their childhood with the same benefit.

Mainline Protestants also benefit from past generations of healthy marriages. They are more likely than others to have grown up in intact families. Ironically, these more liberal churches have the most traditional families, where one parent was able to stay home and provide care for the children. They have had the benefit of positive marriage role models of both a father and mother.

Despite the privileges benefiting their members, mainline churches continue to advocate family policies that perpetuate poverty, violence and other social ills among the poor. At the 2000 General Convention, the Episcopal Church voted to recognize that some people do live in sexual relationships outside of marriage. What some meant to be descriptive was taken by progressives in the church as recognition that such relationships are indeed acceptable. The resolution was seen as liberation from an outdated taboo.

But for those struggling just to make ends meet, or youth whose parents are not able to provide a financial safety net for their children, this is not liberation but enslavement.

The Protestant mainline is largely a middle and upper-middle class social group whose socio-economic prosperity shields it from many of the problems that accompany marriage breakup.

The disastrous results of sexual relationships outside of marriage are multiplied in the context of poverty. While an affluent family might be able to support a young daughter's child without support from the father (or pay for that daughter's abortion), such births among the economically disadvantaged have far more wide-ranging negative effects.

In the past decade, there has been a surge of social science investigation in the area of marriage and family life. Most of these data point to the critical role that family life plays in the civil society of our nation. Marriage is not a merely private endeavor. Marriage has profound consequences for the civic, cultural, political and religious spheres of society.

Most marriages begin in churches. But for some reason our churches have been unwilling to teach young people what it means to be married, what they need to know to be married and how to stay happily married once they have exchanged rings.

Unfortunately the mainline churches seem headed in the wrong direction. Rather than giving young people the tools to build strong and healthy marriages, the mainline seems intent on endorsing sexual relationships outside of marriage. The mainline will most likely retain its economic advantage. But it is rapidly losing the beneficial influence and example of multi-generational intact families. Looking outward, if any church is serious about addressing the pressing issues of poverty, violence, disease, abuse, and drug addiction, it cannot begin by advocating the very behaviors shown to contribute to such ills.

Our churches cannot be true to their commitment to social justice if they continue down the road they are currently on. Renewing and reviving the institution of marriage is the first step in leading young people away from poverty and violence and toward a life of hope. ✚

Angry Critics Attack IRD

by Mark Tooley

While attending the recent United Methodist Church General Conference in Pittsburgh, two incidents vividly illustrated the Religious Left's antipathy towards the IRD.

In the media room I encountered a United Methodist writer who has written several scathing articles critical of IRD. Recognizing his name tag, I offered my hand, which he declined. He then launched into a vociferous monologue on the evils of IRD, and of the United Methodist program in particular.

Later in the evening, as I sat in a restaurant, a lesbian activist left her table and approached my table. It had been a day of legislative defeats for the pro-homosexuality groups. "On this night, could you as an act of kindness eat in another room?" she asked, implying that the mere presence of an IRD employee was upsetting.

Such anger has been more fully articulated in several publications over the last year that have targeted the IRD as an especially insidious force within mainline churches.

Most notable among them has been *United Methodism at Risk*, a paperback published by United Methodists associated with the Methodist Federation for Social Action, the church's oldest liberal caucus group. It was written by Leon Howell, editor of the now defunct *Christianity and Crisis* magazine, which received funding from the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

The book targets "conservative renewal groups" that seek to return United Methodism to a time when "knowledge was feared, questioning was suppressed and imagination was squelched." Their ultimate goal is to "control" the denomination.

In the book, IRD is excoriated for its past exposes of church involvement with Marxist groups, for its critique of the feminist theology of the Re-Imagining movement, and for its questioning of church leaders' opposition to the U.S. overthrow of Saddam Hussein. In all of these episodes, IRD is supposedly guilty of half-truths and distortions, though exactly how is not specified.

The underlying thesis of *United Methodism at Risk* is that IRD is an outside force, funded by "right-wing" foundations, subverting the "progressive" political stances of United Methodist leaders on homosexuality, abortion, war, the environment, and feminism. IRD is ineffective and inept at appealing to most United Methodists, the book assumes.

But the book contradictorily also claims IRD poses a great threat to United Methodism's involvement with liberal causes. How so? The book refuses to acknowledge that IRD and other

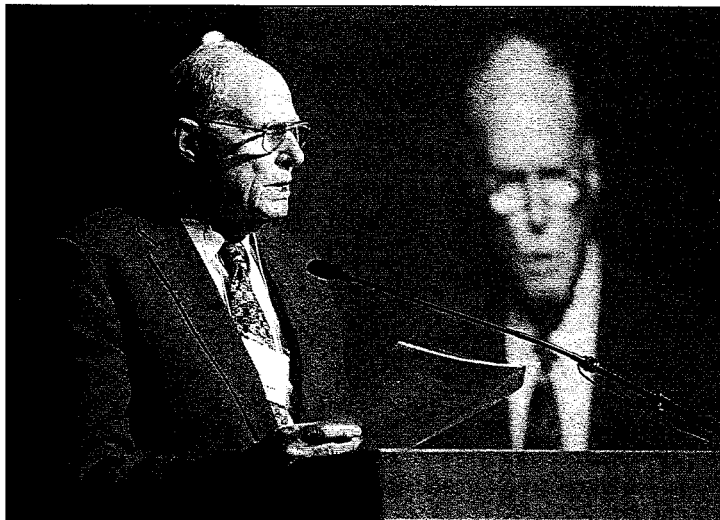
"conservative renewal groups" have influence only insofar as many United Methodists agree with their perspective.

Many of IRD's critics rely on fears of conspiracy. "The political right seeks to gain top leadership positions in the church by spreading information and incendiary allegations...[relying on] the propaganda of 'wedge issues,'" fumed Andrew Weaver, when writing for the Martin Marty Center in Chicago. He warned that "progressive" church members can no longer be naïve about "right-wing advocacy groups that are tightly organized, highly motivated and well-financed for a take-no-prisoners campaign against mainline Protestantism."

In an article written for *Zion's Herald*, an independent liberal magazine for United Methodists, Weaver alleges IRD vilifies church leaders with hopes of replicating the conservative "take-over" of the Southern Baptist Convention. He writes that IRD favors tax cuts for the rich, opposes environmental regulations, supports increased military spending, favors war, and opposes social spending on the poor.

Of course, IRD rarely takes positions on specific legislation, but because it questions church leaders who lobby for liberal legislation, Weaver assumes that IRD must therefore be lobbying for his parody of conservative policy goals.

Even more stridently, Bishop Melvin Talbert, who was then the Ecumenical Officer of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, lashed out



United Methodist Bishop Dale White, one of the authors of the anti-IRD screed, *United Methodism at Risk*.

at IRD and other renewal groups last year for promoting "white supremacy" and "white male domination." Offering no evidence of his charges, Talbert told an audience of liberal United Methodists meeting in Lakeside, Ohio, that "mean-spirited conservatives rooted in outside groups" are trying to "derail" the church from its mission of "social justice and inclusiveness."

IRD has a board that is a "who's who of the political right-wing," Talbert warned. "We face the destructive violence of bad people," he fumed about IRD and other renewal groups. "They are wolves in sheep's clothing."

The liberal critiques of IRD fulminate about "right-wing" support of IRD but do not question whether conservative and moderate church members should have to support liberal political activity through mandatory church apportionments.

IRD has always been denounced by mainline church bureaucracies who are on the receiving end of our critiques. But the denunciations have grown fiercer. Within United Methodism, this is likely because the denomination is slowly but inexorably shifting away from unquestioned liberal control. Someone has to be blamed. And IRD, as an "outside" force, is a wonderful target for liberal church activists who prefer not to blame their own failure to win most United Methodists to their cause after decades of ascendancy.

Critiquing the Revisionist Case in *Journey Together Faithfully*

by A.J. Nolte

Like many mainline church bodies, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has grappled of late with the question of whether to change its policies prohibiting the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions. In light of this debate, the ELCA'S task force has put forth a study guide entitled *Journey Together Faithfully*. A brief review such as this could not possibly hope to review all the points and facets of the study guide with any degree of thoroughness. Nor does it, in fact, need to do so. In a case where change to an age-old doctrine is being advocated, the burden of proof must always lie with those who would make the change. Thus, the real purpose of this essay is to examine the arguments for changing the current visions and expectations of the ELCA, as stated in *Journey Together Faithfully*.

In general, arguments for changing the doctrine of the church come in two forms. First, some arguments put forward an unexamined portion of scripture which is in clear conflict with the pre-existing doctrine. Such was the case with Luther's justification argument during the Reformation. Second, some arguments consider both scripture references and extra-scriptural factors. Such is the case with the ordination of women (though this remains a highly debated subject). The argument for homosexual ordination is neither based on scripture alone, nor some combination of scripture and other factors. As *Journey* itself acknowledges, scripture has nothing positive to say about homosexuality. Therefore, the argument for the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions is completely dependent on extra-scriptural factors.

The first extra-scriptural argument is based on a claim regarding sexuality itself. The revisionist position, as summarized in *Journey*, claims that sexuality stems from a given, fixed orientation, caused by a variety of circumstances. This claim is debatable. For an orientation to be given and fixed, it must by definition be both not chosen and unchangeable. The most interesting assertion here is unchangeability. We cannot examine this claim without taking into account the ex-gay movement. Perhaps in part due to pressure from GLBT (gay,

lesbian, bisexual and transgendered) activists, ex-gay voices are rarely if ever heard in mainline circles. Yet they do exist, and stand as a stark counter-example to any claim of fixed orientation. "Gay activists claim that all ex-gays really reconvert," says Gene Chase, leader of an ex-gay ministry affiliated with Exodus International and located in Central Pennsylvania. "They can't tolerate even one counter-example, so they focus on those who claim to be ex-gay but turn back." However, Exodus has counter-examples a-plenty. Of those who have completed the program and kept in contact with Dr. Chase, he reports that 85 percent are no longer homosexual. Of course, as he and others (such as Lutheran Pastor and Search Institute founder Dr. Merton Strommen) point out, there are other counter-examples to the fixed orientation theory. "The pro-gay community is very receptive of women who, in their forties after being married with children, decide that they are lesbian," he says "but not to change in the other direction, which is something of a double-standard." Indeed, the existence of groups such as Exodus and of those who change from heterosexuality to homosexuality throws serious doubts on the concept of fixed orientation.

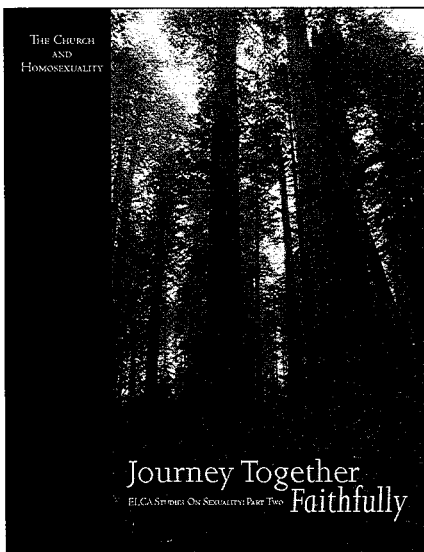
The second extra-scriptural argument is that homosexuality today is qualitatively different from that of Paul's day. This claim rests largely on the theory of orientation, discussed above. Yet, even the claim that homosexuality was understood differently in Paul's day must be questioned. We cannot reasonably claim that Paul's

culture, or the cultures to which he was writing, were less tolerant of homosexuality than our own. The widespread prevalence of homosexuality throughout the Greco-Roman world is a matter of historical record. When Paul condemns homosexual activities in Romans and Corinthians, it may be argued that he is being counter-cultural.

In conclusion, these two props of the GLBT argument, as expounded in *Journey Together Faithfully*, are shaky at best. Indeed, the sexuality study must more seriously examine the underpinnings of these arguments before lending them the prominent position that it does. The document states the arguments, but does not seek to analyze them to any great degree, leaving the reader with the impression that they are stipulated facts. Yet even if the arguments above can be proven, the revisionist case is not. We now know that one can be predisposed (one might even say oriented) toward alcoholism, a fact Paul would not have known when he exhorts Christians against immoderate use of liquor in Titus. Obviously, the church has not embraced the practice of being an alcoholic. Whether homosexuality and drunkenness can be directly equated is not for me to say. However, I would suggest that even if the claims of orientation and historical difference are proven, serious study must still be undertaken before homosexual practice may be condoned in any way. The historic and scriptural teachings of the church cannot be changed for less than dire causes. At this point, the revisionists have not proven that such cause exists. ✚

A.J. Nolte is a junior at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania.

The IRD is committed to identifying and equipping the next generation of church reformers. We recognize that church reform is an ongoing task of God's people. A.J. Nolte is one of these next generation reformers. "Next Generation" will be an occasional feature in Faith & Freedom.



ERITREAN CRACKDOWN ON EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS INTENSIFIES

In May 2002, 12 Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Eritrea were closed by governmental order, forcing over 20,000 church members to meet secretly or risk imprisonment.

Private citizens have been hired by the Eritrean government to operate as spies in their neighborhoods, reporting on any evangelical gatherings that may be occurring. As of February 1, 2004, at least 286 Eritrean evangelicals have been imprisoned for taking part in illicit religious services, possessing Bibles, or witnessing about their faith.

The U.S. State Department reported on the deterioration of religious freedom in Eritrea in a 2003 report. Eritrean officials have claimed that the report is "full of sweeping and slanderous accusations that are based upon unsubstantiated rumors, disseminated on the internet by some disgruntled Eritreans who lack constituency and credibility."

Although the Eritrean constitution guarantees freedom of religion, only four religious bodies are recognized by the state as legitimate—the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, and Islam.

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN ASSAULTED, CONVICTED FOR BREACH OF PEACE

The conviction of an elderly man for disturbing the peace was upheld by Britain's High Court in January, despite his being physically assaulted in what otherwise was a peaceful protest against homosexual behavior.

In October 2001, Harry Hammond, 69, led a singular demonstration in Bournemouth, England, holding a sign reading "Stop Immorality, Stop Homosexuality, Stop Lesbianism." The sign also made reference to Jesus.

A crowd of 30 or 40 individuals surrounded Hammond and verbally attacked him. Soil was thrown at him, and water was dumped over his head. A counter-protester attempted to take the sign from Hammond, knocking him to the ground.

In upholding the conviction, the High Court determined that, according to the European Convention of Human Rights, Bournemouth authorities acted properly in arresting Hammond, as his sign threatened to cause disorder to the gathering crowd. Hammond was fined 300 British pounds (\$750 in U.S. dollars) and court costs.

Hammond's attorney, Hugh Tomlinson, commented: "It is perfectly proper for the court to restrict 'hate speech.' But it is not proper to restrict speech which is not put in a hateful or fighting way, even though it may be offensive to a particular section of the community, and even though it may cause members of the public to react adversely or even violently."

ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL OPENED IN HAVANA

For the first time since Fidel Castro seized power in 1959, an Orthodox cathedral has opened in communist-controlled Cuba.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I presided over the consecration of St. Nicholas Cathedral in a ceremony attended by President Fidel Castro, and representatives of the National Council of Churches. The service marked the first official recognition of the Orthodox Church by the communist government.

The new cathedral was built by the Cuban government as a gift "from the Cuban people" to the Orthodox Church. It is decorated with Greek icons and candelabras, a hand-carved wooden altar, and tiled mosaics that depict leaders of both church and state. One of the mosaics depicts Castro and Patriarch Bartholomew in front of the new cathedral.

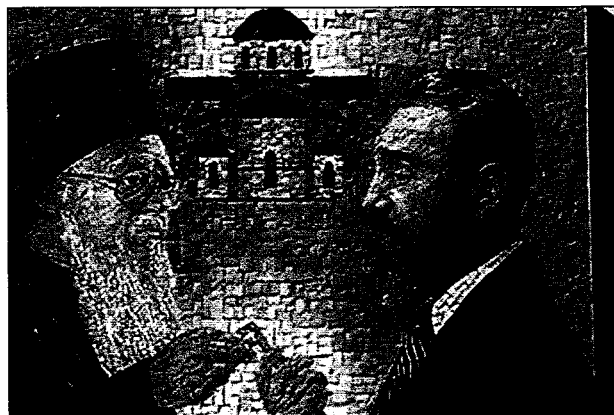
"We are looking forward to working in the area of human rights and religious teaching in Cuba," said the Rev. Alexander Karloutsos, one of the representatives of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America in attendance. "I stood inside this beautiful structure and thought, 'We actually got our church returned.'"

EUROPEAN UNION REMOVES "GOD LANGUAGE" FROM CONSTITUTION

After several months of debate, the convention on the future of Europe unveiled 15 draft articles of the European Union constitution. Despite efforts from a number of member nations and religious leaders, none of the articles makes reference to God or the role religion has played in the development of the region.

The new constitution is intended to simplify European Union law by stating the beliefs and values shared by each of the union members. The final draft includes statements supporting human rights and social justice, promoting environmental stewardship, and acknowledging member countries' national identity. "None of the chapters mentions any deity, or any explicitly religious or Christian values supposed to underpin the European project," according to a British Broadcasting Corporation report.

Supporters of adding religious language included the Vatican and various Jewish, Muslim, and Protestant organizations.



The new Orthodox cathedral sported this mural of Patriarch Bartholomew I and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, whose government routinely imprisons political opponents and human rights activists.

Pope John Paul II was vocal in his support for the acknowledgement of the role of God and religion in the life of Europe. "The participation of Christians in public life, the visible presence of the Catholic Church and of other religious confessions do not put the principle of secularity or the prerogatives of the state in question," he said. "Religion cannot be confined to the private sphere at the risk of denying all that is collective which it represents." ✚

The North Korea Freedom Movement

Forces Set in Motion

by Faith McDonnell

Early in 2003, an open letter listing proposed guidelines for U.S.-North Korea relations was sent to President George W. Bush. This statement was signed by 17 religious and civil leaders including IRD President Diane Knippers and IRD board members Robert George, Richard Neuhaus, and Michael Novak. Published in the *Wall Street Journal* on January 17, 2003, the "Helsinki/Pyongyang" letter encouraged the Bush Administration to deal with the national security threat of North Korea in the same manner in which the U.S. in 1972 dealt with the threat of nuclear war from the Soviet Union.

"Based on the lessons of Helsinki, we strongly believe that the United States must neither directly nor indirectly license a fragile and oppressive Pyongyang regime to commit heightened atrocities against its own people in exchange for yet another promise not to pose nuclear threats to the world order," it declared. Instead, it called for steps to promote such human rights as the free exchange of people, religious liberty, open borders and family reunification. Such rights would feature in negotiations, clarifying that the central United States policy objective towards North Korea is the promotion of democracy while maintaining and enhancing U.S. public diplomacy towards North Korea. Priority status and world attention would be focused on the plight of North Korean refugees and senior level defectors.

DEFECTORS TELL THE STORY

The level of human rights violations was only guessed at until escapees and defectors started to reveal the hellish conditions inside North Korea. An estimated 400 North Koreans die daily from starvation and nearly 50 are executed each day (out of a population close to that of Texas). Those who take any actions or make statements showing less-than-total support for the regime are harshly punished in North Korea's vast gulag of prison camps. Faith in a greater power than the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il is ruthlessly repressed and even the word for God—*Ha na nim*—has been banned in North Korea. It is no wonder that so many North Koreans try to flee. Tens—perhaps hundreds—of thousands are hiding in China, often in caves and constantly on the move. China knows that returning these desperate refugees to

North Korea guarantees their imprisonment, torture, and possible death, but continues to repatriate them in violation of the international agreements that it has signed.

The "Helsinki/Pyongyang" letter was only the first step in a campaign to bring an end to the horrific oppression and to bring freedom and democracy in North Korea. As the letter explained, "The animating insight of the Helsinki negotiations was that, by raising human rights issues to high and public priority levels, the United States would set forces and expectations in motion that would undermine the legitimacy of the communist empire." In the intervening months, a campaign for freedom in North Korea has been set in motion. This North Korea freedom movement is comprised of organizations and churches, students and housewives. And it is inspired by the testimony

of courageous North Korean defectors and escapees, and by the powerful actions of those who have devoted their lives to helping North Koreans to escape.

IRD's contribution to the North Korea freedom movement is the Liberty Initiative for North Korea (LINK). Through LINK we are educating church members about the persecution

of Christians and general deplorable human rights conditions in North Korea. We are providing resources and opportunities for church members to help fight for the freedom of the people of North Korea. In the Christmas season of 2003 we introduced our Korean Christmas buttons. We urged people to wear these buttons in solidarity with Christians in North Korea who are not free to celebrate the birth of Christ. We are presenting LINK to individual churches to counter the official policy of most of the mainline Protestant churches towards North Korea, which has been one of appeasement. Rather than denouncing abuses inside North Korea, many church leaders prefer to criticize President Bush for identifying the North Korean regime as a part of the "axis of evil."

LINK is a member of the North Korea Freedom Coalition. This coalition sponsored North Korea Freedom Day in Washington, DC, on April 28, 2004. The day began with a packed press conference featuring the largest gathering of North Korean defectors ever. The press conference was followed by a demonstration against North Korea's death camps in the Raoul Wallenberg field adjacent to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. From there, participants marched to the U.S. Capitol for the North Korea Freedom Day rally. At the rally, hundreds of participants listened to speakers such as Senator Sam Brownback, U.S. Representatives

The North Korea freedom movement is inspired by the testimony of courageous North Korean defectors and escapees, and by the powerful actions of those who have devoted their lives to helping North Koreans to escape.

Trent Franks and Ed Royce, U.S. Ambassador for Religious Liberty John Hanford, as well as North Korea defectors and other compelling speakers.

MANY LINKS IN THE CHAIN

Another "link" in the North Korea freedom movement was a newly formed action group of college students across the country. Liberation in North Korea (LiNK) is the name of this student-led advocacy movement for North Korea which was officially launched at the 18th annual Korean American Students Conference (KASCON) in April 2004. Already this LiNK has chapters on the campuses of 33 colleges and universities across the United States. Hundreds of these students came to Washington, DC, for North Korea Freedom Day (in what was the week before final exams for many).

A force has been set in motion for freedom in North Korea. Asian newspapers carried stories about the North Korea Freedom Day rally, showed photos of defectors and their supporters at the Holocaust Museum, and reported on legislation working its way through Congress to help North Korean refugees and to follow steps to communicate U.S. public diplomacy towards the people of North Korea that were outlined in the "Helsinki/Pyongyang" letter of January 2003. Though the people of North Korea dare not yet express their dreams of freedom and deliverance from want, rumors of forces set in motion on their behalf will bring them hope that their country will one day be free.

LESSONS FROM HELSINKI

The following are excerpts from a statement of proposed guidelines for U.S.-North Korea relations. The document is signed by IRD President Diane Knippers and IRD board members Robert George, Richard John Neuhaus, and Michael Novak. A version of this statement appeared in the January 17, 2003, issue of the Wall Street Journal.

A repressive, powerfully armed communist regime headed by a particularly odious despot creates a crisis in relations with the United States and the world's democracies. It does so by threatening nuclear war if the world's non-communist powers fail to accede to its demands. The crisis manufactured by the regime results from its acute and growing internal crisis of legitimacy and survival, and from the mounting collapse of its economy. The regime demands major, formal negotiations leading to trade and economic assistance and to broad support for its internal security. In particular, the regime demands formal U.S. and international recognition of the permanence of the borders under its control.

Faced with strong political pressures both at home and from U.S. allies to negotiate over the regime's "peace for security" demand... the President of the United States agrees to do so.

But the President takes a "simple" additional step; he broadens the negotiating agenda to make the regime's human rights practices a legitimate item for discussion. Eager to begin negotiations with the United States over its "political-security basket" of demands, eager to establish trade relations with and to receive economic support from the world's democracies, unable to sustain the public position that its internal security depends on the denial of basic human rights, and confident of its ability to repress human rights once its economy and security receive outside support, the regime accepts the President's negotiating proposal.

The above scenario is neither contemporary nor fanciful. It describes events in which the dictator was Leonid Brezhnev not Kim Jong Il, and the regime the Soviet Union, not North Korea....

The animating insight of the Helsinki negotiations was that, by raising human rights issues to high and public priority levels, the United States would set forces and expectations in motion that would undermine the legitimacy of the communist empire. And so it turned out to be....

Confronted today with significantly less potent threats from Kim Jong Il than those made by Brezhnev, the world's democracies are nonetheless confronted, as they were in the early 1970's, with the zero-sum trap of either rewarding North Korea for violating its prior commitments or appearing indifferent to its threats of nuclear war.

Based on the lessons of Helsinki, we strongly believe that the United States must neither directly nor indirectly license a fragile and oppressive Pyongyang regime to commit heightened atrocities against its own people in exchange for yet another promise not to pose nuclear threats to the world order.

Based on the lessons of Helsinki, we also believe that the United States can enter into formal negotiations with Pyongyang in a manner that promotes American and universal ideals and creates unity with our allies....



North Korean defectors Oh Young Hui (left), a former gymnast and Olympics coach, and Soon Ok Lee (right), a former North Korean government official, protest against North Korean human rights violations at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

God is Love

by Meghan Graham

The Sunday morning of the Episcopal Church General Convention, the day of the confirmation hearing in the House of Deputies on the Rev. Canon V. Gene Robinson, I was with a group of about thirty volunteers with the American Anglican Council (AAC) passing out daisies to convention attendees as they walked to morning Eucharist. We were standing in the park directly across from the convention center. As people walked past us, some asked, "What group are you with?" or "What does the daisy stand for?" Given the intensity and emotion of the events at convention, people were reluctant to accept anything, even a daisy, without knowing who was giving it out and for what reason. I responded by simply saying, "God is love." Occasionally, someone would give me a peculiar look, as if still uncertain as to whether or not to trust the innocence of my answer. Others flat-out refused to take the daisy because it was from the AAC. However, the majority of people took the daisies without question, and many people complimented us for the nice gesture.

As people walked by us on their way into the convention center, they passed by two other groups. One group was standing on the sidewalk and the other in median just across the street. The first group was the "God hates fags" group. They carried the most

obscene posters that said such things as "God blew up the space shuttle" and "Homosexuality is Episcopalian Sin." They yelled at clergywomen as they walked by and called them dreadful names. Their message was one of hate and lies. Just across the street was a gay pride group with signs that said "God does not hate" and rainbow flags. These groups shouted at each other in a horrifying and dehumanizing way. It was a difficult situation to watch, and the feeling in the air was intense and oppressive. The environment was so awful that several of the AAC volunteers wept as they watched the battle.

Knowing that people had to walk past these two groups after we handed them daisies gave our job added meaning. It was as if we were handing them a shield of protection with our message of Truth, God is love, before they walked through a battlefield of lies. We were there on that Sunday morning to be light and salt to the convention when the attendees were being bombarded with darkness and hate.

I am thankful that God counted me worthy of being at his servant at General Convention, to pass out daisies, and to tell people "God is love." ✠

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