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Guiding the Faithful: Church Agency Voter Guides and the 2004 Presidential Election

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ALSO UNITED METHODISTS FIGHT OVER SEX AND MUCH ELSE ♦ 2004: A YEAR OF
CONFUSION OVER SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ♦ PRESBYTERIANS IN A MUDDLE OVER
MARRIAGE ♦ VIETNAM CRACKS DOWN ON CHRISTIANS

WITH FROM THE PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS, CHURCH NEWS, IRD DIARY & 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 and the Liberty Initiative for North Korea.

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I was very pleased to see that the present issue of Faith and Freedom has added a new section titled, "Next Generation." Wisdom and prudence demand that we give space for an upcoming generation of church reformers and Christian intellectuals to voice their perspectives, perspectives of those who shall inherit the Keys of the Church. Moreover, Faith and Freedom is to be commended for selecting as their first "Next Generation" contribution Mr. A.J. Nolte's worthy commentary on the dubious ELCA *Journey Together Faithfully* study guide. Readers in my household will be looking forward to this section in upcoming editions.

— John J. Bombaro
via e-mail

[*"Next Generation" is an occasional feature that has appeared in previous editions of Faith and Freedom. We will continue to feature voices from the next generation of reformers in upcoming issues. — ED.*]

Just a note to say that I have sat here the last half hour reading your IRD publication for Spring 2004 and must say that it is the best you have ever produced.

— Richard Kew
Franklin, TN

IRD Analysis of Mainline Human Rights Advocacy Now Available!

On September 27, the Institute on Religion and Democracy released an extensive report critical of human rights advocacy by mainline U.S. Protestant churches and related ecumenical bodies. *Human Rights Advocacy in the Mainline Protestant Churches (2000-2003): A Critical Analysis* is now available on the IRD website (www.ird-renew.org). Printed copies may be purchased for \$5.00 each. Please mail payment to:

Human Rights Report
Institute on Religion and Democracy
1110 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1180
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Photos

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Religious Voices Must Not be Marginalized



by Diane Knippers

The recent campaign season and related political controversies brought forth more discussion of religion and politics than I can remember. [As we go to press, the election has not yet been held.] Some of it is irritating, some amusing, and some even bizarre.

- A group of religious leaders signed full-page newspaper ads proclaiming, "God is Not a Republican.

Or a Democrat." They criticized endorsements of President Bush that call on Christians "to get serious about re-electing President Bush" (Jerry Falwell) or claim that God has revealed that "George Bush is going to win in a walk" (Pat Robertson). Frankly, I would take the ad more seriously if it had included some examples on the other side, such as the comment by James C. Moore, co-author of *Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George Bush Presidential*, addressing a gathering of the Texas Faith Network: "If ever there were a bleeding-heart liberal, it was Jesus Christ. I think the carpenter from Galilee was the original Democrat." Sponsored by Sojourners, the same ad offered a list of issues, exemplary of "Christian citizenship," that were clearly tilted toward Senator Kerry.

- So, while some religious liberals assert that their political views *do* have a religious basis, others worked hard to de-legitimate religious arguments from conservatives. This summer officials of several liberal religious groups charged that the Federal Marriage Amendment would violate the separation of church and state by "enshrining into our Constitution a particular religious viewpoint" on marriage.

- Commentators now identify a partisan "religion gap." Those more firmly attached to the worship, beliefs, and practices of a particular religious body are significantly more inclined to vote Republican. On the other hand, those whose religious attachments are weaker or non-existent tend heavily to vote Democratic.

IRD is asked by reporters to comment on these trends and incidents. In late August, I appeared on Fox News to discuss the "religion gap" between the political parties, along with the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, Robert Edgar. Earlier this summer, I was asked by *The New York Times* to comment on the argument that the Federal Marriage Amendment would violate separation of church and state. I told the *Times* that this was a "blatant attempt by left-leaning religious leaders to undercut and intimidate other religious voices" because the amendment "would define marriage in civil law, not religious ritual."

Because the IRD has been so critical of the political activities of churches, some people assume that we oppose religious influences in public life. That's not true. We believe that people of faith have much to offer in public policy debates.

Beyond the substantive positions (some of which we might agree with, and some we don't), a major benefit is that religious voices remind the nation that there is a transcendent source of authority. Another benefit is that religious engagement in public policy debates broadens democratic participation. In other words, it's healthy that politicians try to listen to Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Indeed, last November, I applauded the launching of the Clergy Leadership Network, an advocacy group that advocates a "progressive" political agenda. My hope was that these activists were moving toward developing independent voluntary associations for their partisan purposes, rather than using our churches themselves!

That's the key. We are wary when churches themselves are directly engaged in specific political advocacy—supporting particular bills or endorsing candidates. We are especially critical when those positions are inconsistent with Scripture or do not represent the informed consciences of people in the pews. But the damage is primarily done to the churches themselves. Political engagement too often detracts from the churches' other gospel imperatives – worship, evangelism, discipleship, charity, and even foreign missions.

Some fear that too much religious engagement is dangerous to our democratic order. Warning of "theocracy," they ask: If one religion gets too much power, won't it impose its narrow understanding of God's will on everyone else?

Former Vice President Al Gore suggested this when he spoke about President Bush's faith in the September 13 issue of the *New Yorker*: "It's a particular kind of religiosity. It's the American version of the same fundamentalist impulse that we see in Saudi Arabia, in Kashmir, in religions around the world: Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Muslim."

Now I don't expect Gore to be a Bush fan. But this comparison is pernicious and wrong. The "fundamentalist impulse that we see in Saudi Arabia" is Wahhabism—the strand of Islam to which Osama bin Laden owes allegiance. Theocracy is a genuine danger in parts of the world. Afghanistan was a theocracy. We must pray that Iraq doesn't become one.

But the United States is a democracy. This means that no one religious perspective can impose its views contrary to the will of the majority. And even if one faith enjoys a majority, we have clear protections of minority rights.

That's not to say that we don't have heated debates over difficult issues. We do. But we also have layers of democratic protections, the legacy of our ancestors, many of whom came to America fleeing religious persecution. Religious voices must not be marginalized and people of faith must not allow themselves to be intimidated in the public square. Indeed, our democracy depends on it. ✕

World Council of Churches Targets U.S. "Violence"

by Mark Tooley

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has made the United States its target country of concern in 2004 as part of the WCC's "Decade to Overcome Violence" (DOV). Throughout this year, the WCC convened events around America to spotlight U.S. complicity in violence and oppression. Over 300 denominations worldwide belong to the Geneva-based WCC, including over 30 U.S. communions.

It is mainly the war in Iraq that inspired the WCC to pick the United States as a nation that is especially prone to violence. But the kick-off event for this year's WCC campaign showed that the WCC is troubled about plenty else regarding the United States.

"We find it a hopeful sign that many Christians in the United States are mobilized against the death penalty, are supportive of international climate treaties, and oppose the way prisoners are currently being treated in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba," enthused one German pastor at a New York meeting of the WCC's anti-violence advisory committee.

Besides war in Iraq, the U.S. war against terrorism, and U.S. refusal to sign international treaties about global warming and land mines, the WCC is angry about the supposed U.S. role in promoting poverty, racism, "cultural imperialism," and inequality in education and unemployment. Also of concern are domestic violence and the lack of gun control in the United States.

When deciding in September 2003 to make the U.S. the focus of the WCC's anti-violence work in 2004, the WCC Central Committee bemoaned that the "ideals of democracy and freedom, of economic success, have been compromised [in the U.S.] by injustice, [and] a too- arrogant and unilateral approach to international concerns."

The WCC Central Committee also implied that President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair should be charged with war crimes for their war in Iraq.

Such specificity about U.S. misdeeds contrasts with the WCC's approach towards last year's country of concern for the DOV, which was Sudan. The WCC said nary a word of criticism against Sudan's Islamist government, which has waged a 20-year war against the non-Muslim south, resulting in 2 million deaths. There was no mention of ethnic cleansing, the imposition of sharia, slavery, or deliberate bombardment of civilian targets.

That those very churches have been the primary targets of Islamic jihad was not evidently a reason for concern by the WCC, which preferred not to fault anybody specifically for the horrific conflict in Sudan.

Evidently the WCC was reserving its ire for the United States, both its government and many of its churches.

"In Europe, the media portrays the church in America as conservative, evangelical, and connected to right-wing parties," agonized the Rev. Fernando Enns of the Ecumenical Institute at the University

of Heidelberg. "This is puzzling to European Christians." Enns was part of the WCC's international anti-violence committee, which met concurrently in New York in January 2004 with a parallel U.S. committee, with support from the National Council of Churches (NCC).

"Many Europeans perceive Americans as merely focused on individual, private religious life," rather than being involved in public policy or corporate dimensions of faith, Enns was reported as saying in a WCC news release. "It is important for us to know that there are different voices in the American church."

By those "different voices," Enns was referring to the leadership of U.S. Protestant denominations that belong the WCC and NCC. He further complained that the U.S. war in Iraq had "shaken the relationship of Europe to the United States."

"If the United States would only live up to its own values in its treatment of Guantanamo prisoners, that would be a witness in itself," Enns asserted.

NCC General Secretary Bob Edgar told the WCC guests that the NCC has a lot of "energy and enthusiasm" for the U.S. focus of the anti-violence campaign. He also announced that the NCC will soon be filing a court brief on behalf of the prisoners at Guantanamo.

A South African professor blasted the "cultural imperialism" of the U.S. "In this case, we don't have the former kind of imperialism, but rather a more subtle form of imperialism characterized by the intrusion of McDonald's and Coca-Cola into all parts of Africa," he lamented.

"And the conservative Christian televangelists have become the model for many church leaders on the continent," the South African further fretted.

According to an NCC news release, the Rev. Otis Moss, pastor of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland Ohio, criticized the Bush Administration for its search for banned weapons in Iraq.

"Where are the weapons of mass destruction?" Moss mockingly asked. "Look around: AIDS is a weapon of mass destruction," he said. "So is hunger, the denial of health care to the poor, illiterate and uneducated minds, tobacco and tobacco-related illnesses, uncared-for children."

The WCC anti-violence, anti-U.S. theme is similar to its program of the early 1990s, when it sought to persuade the United Nations to investigate racist-inspired human rights violations in the United States. As evidence of increased racial hatred, the WCC, with help from the NCC, pointed to the 1994 Republican take-over of Congress, the increased activism of conservative religious groups, and anti-crime legislation such as the "three-strikes-and-you're-out" bill. Only Cuba, Sudan, and China voted for the proposal.

Presumably, the governments of Cuba, Sudan, and China have no reason to fear that they will ever arouse the ire of the WCC. Indeed, no repressive communist or Islamist regime need be concerned that the WCC will offer them anything other than friendship, despite the ongoing repression of Christian churches under those regimes.

During the final decades of the Cold War, the WCC and the NCC largely ignored human rights abuses under the old Soviet bloc. They now ignore human rights abuses under Islamist rule. But across the last 35 years the WCC and NCC have always been consistent: portray the U.S. as the primary architect of violence and oppression in the world.

It is mainly the war in Iraq that inspired the WCC to pick the United States as a nation that is especially prone to violence.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Visits Cuba

by Fr. Johannes L. Jacobse

When Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visited Cuba in late January, he followed a script written in the 1970s. We might call this the Fidel Castro scenario: Invite a prominent Church leader to take part in a public show of religious tolerance in order to mask the fundamentally anti-religious policies of the Cuban dictator's regime. When the Patriarch consecrated an Orthodox Church that closed when Communism was imposed on Cuba, he barely whispered a word about Castro's human rights abuses.

The first clue that something was amiss with the Patriarch's Cuba trip was that the National Council of Churches (NCC) "happened" to be there at the same time. The NCC has a deplorable record of ignoring human rights violations under communist regimes. In the 1970s and 1980s, it embraced "Liberation theology" and funneled millions into left wing organizations sympathetic to totalitarian regimes.

The fall of communism startled the NCC but not enough to change it. In 1993, The Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, the former General Secretary of the NCC, confessed, "We did not understand the depth of the suffering of Christians under communism. And we failed to really cry out under the communist oppression." Despite the confession, the NCC last year blamed America for the division between North and South Korea while affirming North Korea's right to retain nuclear weapons. It never mentioned the human rights catastrophe in North Korea, including the millions dead by starvation.

NCC coddling of the Cuban regime is nothing new. In 1976 the NCC praised Castro for "a social system built on the principle that every human being, weak or strong, sick or healthy, sustains dignity only by having something to do." A 1992 mission study included the children's story, "A Young Cuban Christian." It taught young readers, "Christians just want to help people and that is the same as the Revolution."

Why are some Orthodox representatives aligned with the NCC? They think that the NCC can expand Orthodox influence in religious circles.

As recently as two years ago, financial mismanagement threatened to close the NCC's doors. It routinely spent 30 percent more than it took in. It claimed to represent more than 50 million American Christians but the reality was that 64 percent of its support came from two member communions—the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In fiscal year 2000-2001, more than 45 percent of its budget went to fundraising, management, and general expenses.

This near-death experience chastened the NCC. It expanded ecumenical reach to Catholics, Evangelicals, and Orthodox. Catholics and Evangelicals wisely declined. American Orthodoxy responded hoping to broaden its public presence while the NCC got a much needed boost of credibility. A Greek Orthodox Christian, Dr. Elenie Huszagh, was NCC president in 2002-2003.

Thus, the meeting between the NCC and Patriarch doesn't appear to be as spontaneous as both sides claim. NCC representatives were serving as Orthodox advisors at most public events. This influence is seen in two Patriarchal missteps.

The first was the Patriarch's honoring of Castro with "The Cross of St. Andrew." No such award actually exists. It's a scaled down version of the "The Order of St. Andrew," the highest honor given to laymen for exemplary service to the Church. How Castro qualified is anyone's guess since the Order presumes obedience to such basic commandments as "Thou shalt not kill."

Patriarch watchers report that Bartholomew, although well educated and well traveled, misunderstands the symbolism of public acts. He doesn't understand that it makes no sense to offer a cross to an avowed atheist and persecutor of Christians. Contrast the Patriarch's gift to the action taken by Pope John Paul II during his 1998 visit to Cuba when he wagged a finger at a liberationist priest in full view of the world press. Who communicated the Christian moral tradition more clearly?

The majority of the Patriarch's professional life has taken place in modern day Istanbul under Turkish control where western cultural values like free speech, inquiry, and debate don't exist. Giving a gift to Castro is reasonable if it represents the polite necessities of diplomatic protocol, but why not substitute a simple gift such as an art work instead of the Cross of St. Andrew? This would have avoided the moral confusion and outrage that resulted.

The second misstep was the Patriarch's condemnation of the American embargo on Cuba. Lifting the embargo is the NCC's favorite punching bag. Whether or not the embargo should be lifted is open to debate. But the implication that lifting the embargo will measurably improve the Cuban economy is historically naïve.

Cuba's economy was already on the skids when the Soviet Union was subsidizing Cuba to the tune of \$6 million per day. The subsidy ended after the Soviet Union fell, causing the Cuban economy to tank. Ending the embargo may improve Cuba's fortunes a bit, but prosperity won't return until the Marxist grip on the economy is broken.

Religious leaders are expected to make moral judgments, but those judgments must be informed. Castro should not have received the Cross of St. Andrew. Castro's brutal trampling of human rights is the pressing issue, not the U.S. embargo. Protocol might not allow an open rebuke of Castro, but lessons can be taught in other ways such as holding meetings with dissidents, or by issuing strong statements in their defense. Archbishop Demetrios, the leader of American Greek Orthodox Christians, ended up meeting with dissidents on behalf of the Patriarch. It was good, but not good enough.

Did these mistakes occur because the NCC view of the world dominated the planning of the trip? One delegate reported that he pleaded with the NCC to make a visit to a Cuban prison. They refused. Meanwhile, they complained loudly about the American government's refusal to allow them entry to Guantanamo Bay. The moral confusion of the NCC is bound to influence any church that is closely aligned with it.

It was good that Patriarch Bartholomew visited Cuba. But the Patriarch must be alert to those who would use his office in ways that diminish his authority and the moral tradition he represents. As soon as the Patriarch returned home, Castro claimed that the visit of the Orthodox Christian delegation proved that religious freedom exists in Cuba. Meanwhile hundreds of prisoners of conscience still languish in his jails.

Fr. Johannes L. Jacobse is a priest in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and edits the website OrthodoxyToday.org. This article was published on the Front Page Magazine website. It is reproduced with the permission of the author.

Who Profits From the Methodist Building?

by Mark Tooley

The United Methodist Church's Board of Church and Society continues to occupy and profit from its Capitol Hill office building in Washington, D.C., in defiance of the 1965 trust that designates the building's income for anti-alcohol abuse.

United Methodism's governing General Conference, meeting in Spring 2004, defeated one proposal that would have honored the 1965 trust but was refused the opportunity to debate or even vote on another. At stake are millions of dollars and a large chunk of the income that sustains the left-wing lobbying activities of the Board of Church and Society. About two-thirds of the board's annual \$5 million budget comes from the building's income or other investments that probably should fall under the restrictions of the 1965 trust agreement.

The 1965 Methodist Building Trust Agreement, which transferred the assets of the old Methodist Temperance Board to the current Board of Church and Society, requires that these assets must be used for programs relating to alcohol abuse. Church and Society has treated income from these assets as undesignated assets for most of the last 40 years, it was recently learned.

One proposal at General Conference would have created a new Commission on Alcohol and Drugs whose income would have come from the Methodist Building. Jared Thomas, a college student from Ohio, argued for the proposal.

"If our United Methodist universities condone underage drinking in their own freshman dorms, how much more does our world need to hear [about alcohol abuse] and be ministered to in light of the terrible evils of addiction?" Thomas asked.

Thomas noted that in 1960 seventy denominations were using materials produced by the old Methodist Board of Temperance. But today, the Board of Church and Society does not even have a budget line item devoted to alcohol concerns.

"If it is argued out that they [Church and Society] will be losing money for other projects, it will only be because they were

not following their moral obligation to follow the trust in the first place," Thomas pointed out.

General Conference delegates voted by 34 percent to 66 percent to refer the proposal for study by the Board of Church and Society, effectively burying it.

Another proposal would have required Church and Society to comply with the 1965 trust agreement. However, delegates were never permitted a chance to debate it. Bishop Ernest Lyght, as presiding officer, ruled all attempts to debate it as out of order.

Bill Smallwood of Mississippi asked if copies of the 1965 Trust Agreement could be distributed to delegates. "We've been told that it's been complied with, and I simply do not believe that's the truth," he said. Bishop Lyght referred Smallwood to Church and Society for further information.

Recently obtained legal documents show that staffers of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society have sought legal justifications for evading how income from the United Methodist Building is supposed to be spent.

But according to these documents, Church and Society's own legal counsel declined to provide legal justification for currently spending any amount of the trust's income or principal on anything other than temperance and alcohol related problems.

The 1965 Trust Agreement stipulates that the Trust must be devoted exclusively to "work in the areas of temperance and alcohol problems"

But the 2000-2001 audit of the Board of Church and Society reveals that the Board's management ignored this stipulation over the last nearly four decades. Instead, the Board has used income from the Trust for the Board's general operating expenses.

Suddenly concerned about legal vulnerability, the Board sought legal advice from the D.C. law firm of Caplin and Drysdale in fall 2002. In three letters from attorney Milton Cerny, dated October and November 2002, staffers of the board were told that the "language of the Trust is quite specific" and could not be "realistically interpreted to stretch any further."

Cerny did not provide the board with any legal justification for having already spent trust income on general purposes for nearly 40 years. But, to justify future spending for general purposes, he suggested the board could go to a court, claiming the trust's original purpose had become "obsolete."

To avoid court involvement, Cerny suggested the board, as the successor to the temperance agency, could unilaterally institute new rules for the trust. But he warned that, if legally challenged, it is "far from certain" that a court would accept this.

Cerny concluded that with either option, it would "apparently be necessary to obtain the approval of the General Conference of the Church." But the Board has declined to follow its own legal advice. Instead, it set aside the 1965 value of the trust, which is \$2,603,039, and is designating income from that principal for alcohol related causes. Income from the remaining two thirds of the Trust's estimated current value will be spent on the Board's general purposes.

In fact, the Trust's value has almost certainly grown beyond what Church and Society calculated, and probably comprises the bulk of Church and Society's assets of \$21,283,655 (2001 total).

The 1965 United Methodist Building Trust stipulates that the building is to be used for programs relating to alcohol abuse.



United Methodists Fight Over Sex and Much Else

by Mark Tooley

The United Methodist Church, America's second-largest Protestant denomination, strengthened its stance against homosexuality at its April 27–May 7, 2004, General Conference in Pittsburgh. Comparing multiple votes in 2004 and 2000, the margins against any acceptance of homosexual practice were in most cases slightly larger this year than in 2000.

The only item on which there was a smaller conservative vote in 2004 than in 2000 was the language in the Social Principles declaring homosexual practice “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Here the margin was reduced from 65 percent to 60 percent. This could be deference to the liberal Church and Society legislative committee, which preferred the “compromise” language. Four years ago, this legislation was handled by the more conservative Faith and Order Committee, which recommended an unaltered “incompatibility” standard.

Both in 2000 and 2004, numerous attempts at “compromise” language on homosexuality were rejected. In 2000, the closest vote on compromise language was a proposal to change “we do not condone” to “many do not condone.” This weaker language was defeated by 54 percent. In 2004, a compromise that would have said that the United Methodist Church does not condone homosexual practice, but recognizes disagreement on the matter, was defeated by 55 percent.

The 2004 General Conference also voted to reinforce the United Methodist Church's disapproval of homosexual practice in several new areas. By 77 percent, it endorsed language submitted by IRD/UMAction supporting laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

By 88 percent, it endorsed another IRD/UMAction suggested addition to the Social Principles, affirming “the importance of both fathers and mothers for all children.”

By 54 percent, General Conference voted to expand the prohibition of church agency funding for pro-homosexuality advocacy to include local annual conferences. By 51 percent, the General Conference voted to specify that chargeable offenses for clergy include not being celibate in singleness or not being faithful in marriage, being a self-avowed practicing homosexual, or conducting same-sex ceremonies.

With future General Conferences filled with increasing numbers of delegates from more conservative regions, especially the African conferences, there is little reason to expect any reduction in the margins upholding traditional Christian teachings on sexuality.

On the floor of the General Conference in Pittsburgh, liberal U.S. advocates of homosexuality sparred with traditional United Methodists from Africa.

At the 2004 General Conference, almost 20 percent of the delegates were from outside the United States, over two-thirds of them from Africa. Thanks to the acceptance of the one-million member Ivory Coast Methodist Church into United Methodism at this General Conference, the number of international delegates will grow to 30 percent. United Methodism in Africa is growing dramatically, while the U.S. church continues to decline.

“We have received teaching from our missionaries on marriage,” said Tshibang Kasap 'Owan from the Congo, who recalled African polygamy. “And the Christian teaching that we received taught that there should be marriage between one man and one woman.... We Africans, we accepted this teaching, and we became Christians.”

Tshibang regretted, “Now we are hearing another message in this General Conference, speaking of homosexuality.”

But the openly homosexual Mark Miller, a lay delegate from New Jersey, insisted Christian teachings about marriage and sex are not essential doctrines. “I wish I could...carry you to the places I've been...around this country...playing music...and the practice of my sexuality...was never the essential that was asked in those cases.”

Yema Kasongo from the Congo saw it differently. “The church needs to speak with a clear voice” not an “ambiguous” one, he said. “The church is not here to follow the will of every...person. It is to the individual to follow God's will through the church's voice.”

Bob Edgar from Ohio insisted that there could be Christian disagreement over homosexuality. “The truth in this moment is not to argue over who's right or wrong on homosexuality, the truth...is that people of good faith see this in more than one way.”

But Muland Aying Kambol from the Congo warned about the church's compromising its sexual teachings. “If The United Methodist Church today is passing through a time of confusion, our children will live through a time of destruction in the church.” He asked if it is “permissible to us to waste so much time speaking about sin.”

Janet Ellinger of Wisconsin compared disapproval of homosexual practice to racism. “Our church since 1972 has tried to steal the identity of homosexual persons. We do it as boldly now as we have done with others in the past.”

Forbes Matonga of Zimbabwe responded: “When we are saying ‘no’ to homosexuality, we are not hating the persons.... Like prostitution and everything else, it is not [about] a person. It is about a practice.” Jeffrey Kuan from California claimed opposition to homosexuality is based on “meager biblical evidence,” unlike biblical injunctions against divorce and remarriage. “When will we...acknowledge our inconsistencies and hypocrisy?”

By 77 percent, it endorsed language submitted by IRD/UMAction supporting laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Samuel Quire from Liberia was explicit in his response: "I don't think The United Methodist Church can license people to go to hell.... It is a sin that leads to hell."

SOCIAL GOSPEL AND WAR

Ignoring the turmoil over sexuality, retiring Bishop Ken Carder of Mississippi, delivering the episcopal address to the United Methodist General Conference, gave an old-fashioned Social Gospel message, emphasizing the political reform of social institutions above the spiritual conversion of individuals to faith in Jesus Christ.

Carder's condemnations were directed against the "widening gap between the rich and the poor, the pervasiveness of market forces dominated by the wealthiest of nations, and the prevalence of personal and corporate greed [that] threaten the very existence of vast populations and the ecosystem itself."

In an implicit swipe at the war against terrorism, Carder lamented, "The reliance on violence and military solutions to conflicts destroys life and compounds terror in the name of resisting terror." Carder also complained about the "current mood of political imperialism."

The episcopal address—given at every quadrennial General Conference—is a task

assigned typically to a respected retiring bishop. But the text is reviewed and edited by the whole Council of Bishops, and it is considered as a statement from the Council, as Carder emphasized at a later press conference.

Although Carder spoke of both "personal salvation and social transformation," he focused on the latter and had little to say about the former.

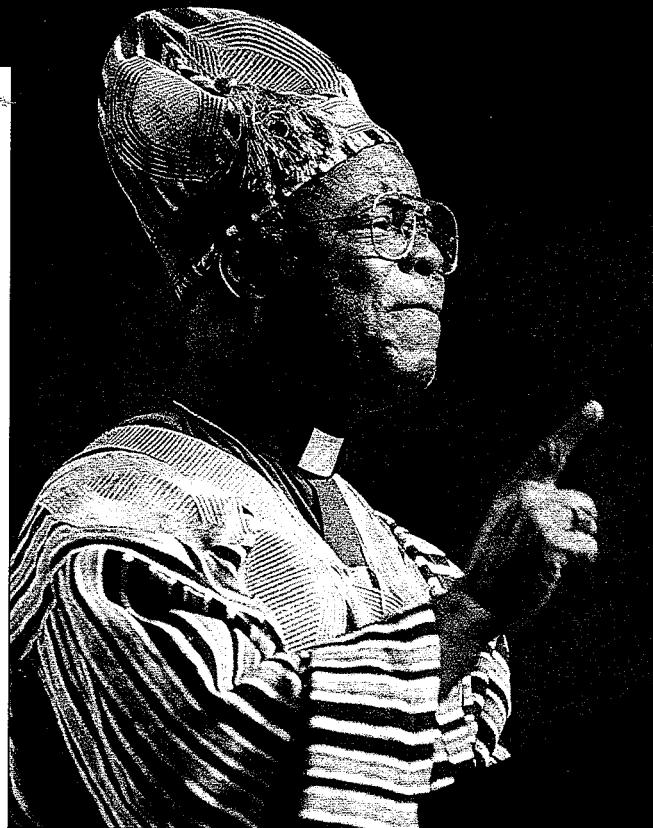
The church's witness to the Gospel is seen in "those who support social and economic policies that make the earth's resources accessible to all of God's beloved children." Although Carder spoke with great certitude about what the government must do to exemplify economic justice, he was vague about the church's teachings on sexual morality.

Amazingly, given the harsh criticism of the U.S. war in Iraq by United Methodist bishops and church bureaucrats, General Conference said little about the war.

Indeed, despite desires by the Board of Church and Society for a pacifist stance, the General Conference declined to revoke its 2000 addition to the United Methodist Social Principles acknowledging aggression, tyranny and genocide as potentially just reasons for war.

In fact, language was added to reinforce this point. The Social Principles were amended to say that war, though "incompatible with the teachings" of Christ, could be employed as a "last resort in the prevention of such evils as genocide, brutal suppression of human rights, and unprovoked international aggression."

The 2000 General Conference added language to paragraph 164G to acknowledge that "most Christians believe that when peaceful alternatives have failed, the force of arms may regretfully be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide." The 2004 General Conference, at Church and Society's suggestion, changed "most Christians," to "many Christians." It also added this statement: "As Christians,



United Methodist Bishop Arthur Kulah of Liberia tells delegates that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. The number of African delegates was increased at this year's General Conference.

we are aware that neither the way of military action, nor the way of inaction, is always righteous before God."

The Methodist Federation for Social Action, a liberal caucus group, called the General Conference's reticence about the war in Iraq "a major disappointment." Delegates did voice support for an investigation into the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners.

The United Methodist Council of Bishops, which met before General Conference, issued a statement denouncing "the continued warfare by the U.S. and coalition forces." There was no condemnation of Iraqi terrorist groups against which coalition forces are fighting.

SEXUALITY DEBATE KEY FOCUS OF RELIGIOUS LEFT

Perhaps one reason the General Conference did not spend more time discussing Iraq was that almost all energy was expended on debates over marriage and sex. After losing all the major votes on sexual morality, hundreds of pro-homosexuality demonstrators, at the invitation of presiding Bishop Janice Huie of Arkansas, marched onto the General Conference floor to demonstrate their disapproval.

The demonstration was led by Souforce, a homosexuality advocacy group. More than

General Conference Votes on Homosexuality:

Affirmation in Social Principles that the United Methodist Church does not condone homosexual practice:

- 2000 – 65 percent
- 2004 – 60 percent

Prohibition of practicing homosexual clergy:

- 2000 – 67 percent
- 2004 – 72 percent

Prohibition of same-sex unions in churches or by clergy:

- 2000 – 69 percent
- 2004 – 80 percent

Requirement of celibacy in singleness and monogamy in marriage:

- 2000 – 80 percent
- 2004 – 85 percent

Prohibition of funding for pro-homosexuality advocacy by general church:

- 2000 – 70 percent
- 2004 – 99 percent

500 people circled the floor of the conference for 35 minutes carrying banners and singing.

"They come in peace as a witness among us. I invite you to embody God's love to these strangers and friends," explained Bishop Huie. No demonstrators from other causes were permitted on the floor of the General Conference.

Leading the group around the room, a single voice issued an invitation to "those who want to reconcile, those who want justice, come out and join us."

Several hundred delegates, and about two dozen bishops, stood in solidarity, sang and clapped in unison with the demonstrators.

But the votes had already been taken, and then reinforced by rulings from the church's top court.

Confronted by the refusal of a church court jury in Washington state to act against openly lesbian minister Karen Dammann, the Judicial Council ruled during General Conference that practicing homosexuals may not serve as United Methodist clergy.

Four members of the Judicial Council were willing to set aside the Dammann acquittal, saying the jury had "negated, ignored and violated provisions of the Discipline." Therefore, the minority ruled that the jury verdict should have been "null, void and of no effect."

However, the Judicial Council, in a 5-4 decision, declined to go further by overturning the Washington jury's decision. But the election of new Judicial Council members by this General Conference may now mean that a majority would be willing in future cases to overturn questionable jury acquittals.

The five who declined to overturn the Dammann verdict have rotated off the council. Of their replacements, two new Council members, including a new member from Africa, may vote with the four dissenters in the future.

By a 6-3 majority, the Judicial Council ruled that the practice of homosexuality is a chargeable offense under 2702.1(b) of the 2000 Discipline, contradicting the Washington state jury, which claimed that the prohibition was only advisory.

Though a majority was unwilling to claim authority for specifically setting aside the Dammann jury verdict, the majority ruled that a clergy person whom a jury has found to be a self-avowed, practicing homosexual may

not be appointed by a bishop. Dammann's jury did find her to be such. Therefore, if her bishop appoints Dammann to a church, he could face charges himself.

Dammann has since taken a leave of absence, which postponed any decision-making by her bishop.

A future decision by the Judicial Council to overturn a jury verdict could precipitate a confrontation with the liberal-dominated Western Jurisdiction, many of whose officials are unwilling to enforce church teachings about sexuality.

MANY OTHER RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED

Although General Conference supported traditional Christian beliefs on sexuality, it did little to do the same on abortion.

About 58 percent of delegates voted to support continued membership by United Methodist agencies in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, which supports legalized abortion in all circumstances.

All efforts to soften United Methodist support for abortion rights were defeated.

However, language was added to Paragraph 161.J of the *Social Principles* to say, "We particularly encourage the church, the government, and social service agencies to support and facilitate the option of adoption."

Also, ministry was encouraged for "those who regret a past abortion." Pastors

and local churches were encouraged to make referrals and information available for those seeking help with "post-abortion stress."

Resolutions opposing assisted suicide and euthanasia were approved. And the destruction of human embryos for research purposes was opposed.

Previously, the United Methodist *Social Principles* had been as uncritical of divorce as they are of abortion, only calling divorce a "regrettable alternative in the midst of brokenness."

But this General Conference added new language, in part submitted by IRD/UMAction, declaring that "God's plan is for lifelong faithful marriage" and urging the church to be in the "forefront of premarital and post-marital counseling in order to create and preserve strong marriages." It also says: "We grieve over the devastating emotional, spiritual and economic consequences of divorce for all involved and are concerned about high divorce rates."

Changes to the church's *Social Principles* were debated vigorously. But political statements for *The Book of Resolutions*, if they were liberal, were often quickly adopted with little discussion.

Largely introduced by the Board of Church and Society or liberal caucus groups, these resolutions are ignored by most United Methodists but nonetheless give seeming legitimacy to Church and Society's political lobbying on Capitol Hill.

Political Actions Taken by the 2004 United Methodist General Conference:

- Endorsed a boycott of Taco Bell because of alleged mistreatment of migrant workers by its suppliers.
- Endorsed a boycott against the Mount Olive Pickle company in North Carolina for not forcing farmers to unionize their laborers.
- Called on the U.S. government to "cease and desist" from all "unilateral first-strike" military actions without collaboration from the United Nations.
- Endorsed ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty that would restrict U.S. use of fossil fuels to stave off "global warming."
- Condemned the Israeli presence in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.
- Opposed "detrimental" privatization of public resources around the world and instead supported governmental control.
- Supported study of possible U.S. reparations for the descendants of African slaves.
- Opposed the U.S. Patriot Act, which Congress passed in the wake of 9-11 to strengthen some police powers against potential terrorists.
- Opposed U.S. arms sales to all countries.
- Supported removal of U.S. military forces from Okinawa, Japan.
- Supported removing sanctions against the communist regime of North Korea.
- Opposed all sanctions against Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba.

2004: A Year of Confusion Over Same-Sex Marriage

Both Church and State Struggle for a Coherent Response

by Erik Nelson

On May 27, Massachusetts became the first state to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. While other states—Vermont most famously—have legislative arrangements for same-sex couples to enter into civil unions, Massachusetts has become the first to offer homosexuals full marriage, along with all its benefits.

But it seems obvious that not all same-sex couples taking advantage of Massachusetts' brave new world of marriage are willing to shoulder marriage's responsibilities. In fact, some are open about their desire to flout them.

"I think it's possible to love more than one person and have more than one partner," said Jonathan Yarbough, a Canadian who had traveled to Massachusetts to marry his homosexual partner, to the *Boston Herald*. Yarbough, who says he is bisexual, claimed that the concept of "forever" in marriage is "overrated."

Yarbough and his partner have decided that their marriage will be "open"—that either party will be free to have sex outside of their marriage commitment.

Supporters of same-sex marriage often claim that the state sanctioning of such marriages will have no effect on the institution of marriage itself. In the case of Yarbough and his partner, however, we already see how some intend to use same-sex marriage to redefine marriage. Marriage no longer requires a lifetime commitment; it is no longer monogamous, no longer between a man and a woman, and no longer open to procreation.

This arrangement leaves little left of traditional marriage. With the state's approval—and in some cases church blessing—the existence of such marriages makes it even more difficult for parents to encourage their children to save sex for marriage. In fact, it makes marriage itself a tough sell.

To expect, as many pro-homosexuality advocates do, that such a change in the institution of marriage will not have socioeconomic effects would be to repeat the mistake of the 1970s in regard to divorce. After being told that no-fault divorce would have no deleterious effect on the family, our nation is now faced with a catalogue of social and economic ills directly springing from the effects of common divorce, including the feminization of both poverty and childrearing.

An overwhelming body of social science data has demonstrated that some of America's greatest social problems, including violent crime and child poverty, correlate closely with family disintegration. Children do best, according to this data, when their own biological mothers and fathers raise them—an environment that same-sex marriage cannot provide.

Unfortunately, our churches are often unprepared for such a challenge, and many of them seem unwilling to become involved. Many understand that the issue goes far beyond homosexuality, to the sexual dysfunction that is pervasive not only in our culture but—and let's be honest here—also in our churches. The light thrown on the issue of homosexuality has also thrown light on the paucity of solid teaching regarding sex, marriage and family that is the *status quo* in our churches. Notably, divorce is rampant not only among church members, but the clergy as well.

While our culture has continually thrown challenges at the

...it seems obvious that not all same-sex couples taking advantage of Massachusetts' brave new world of marriage are willing to shoulder marriage's responsibilities. In fact, some are open about their desire to flout them.

church concerning human sexuality, the church has largely talked around the issue. So it is no surprise that many of our churches have begun to mirror

the culture more than they mirror the teachings of Christ. Our churches put up only rudimentary defenses against divorce, premarital sex, and cohabitation. All of these issues have eaten away at the foundation of marriage in our society. And our churches, aware of the threat but blinded by their own sin, have responded with confusion.

In this confusion, many churches feel like a deer caught in the headlights. And the vehicle of culture moving at them has no intention of using its brakes.

CHURCH RESPONSES

The Washington-based lobbying offices of several mainline churches have been eager to advocate on behalf of same-sex marriage, despite either reticence or outright hostility to the issue by people in the pews.

On June 2, the Episcopal Church and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), along with the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the American Jewish Committee signed on to a statement urging the rejection of the Federal Marriage Amendment.

The statement caused a stir among Presbyterians and Episcopalians, neither of which had passed any resolutions

explicitly addressing the Federal Marriage Amendment. The statement argued that the FMA would violate the separation of church and state by enshrining in law a specifically Christian view of marriage.

This is, of course, an absurd argument. So long as government institutions recognize marriage, the definition of marriage is a legitimate public policy question. If one applied the argument of the FMA opponents to the civil rights debate, for example, one might have opposed the goals of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., because he believed the Bible taught the dignity of persons regardless of race.

PCUSA Washington Office Director Elenora Giddings Ivory had spoken out on this issue previously. On March 3, at a Capitol Hill press conference, Ivory claimed "Presbyterian Church General Assemblies have affirmed the civil right of same-sex couples to civil marriage." Therefore, she said, "the states should permit gay and lesbian couples access to the civil status of civil marriage." The Washington Office director asserted that, in denying the status of marriage to same-sex couples, the Federal Marriage Amendment "would restrict the civil rights of millions of Americans."

Ivory seriously misstated PCUSA policy. Her advocacy resulted in a statement from PCUSA Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick, which corrected her distortion of PCUSA policy: "...the General Assembly has not taken any action to 'publicly oppose' the Marriage Amendment." Kirkpatrick also repeated the definition of marriage in the PCUSA *Book of Order* as "a civil contract between a woman and a man" (W-4.9001).

Ivory's actions resulted in a backlash at the PCUSA General Assembly just over one month later. The General Assembly passed, by a 299-192 vote, a statement explaining that "Nothing the 216th General Assembly (2004) has said or acted upon is to be construed to state or imply a position for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment. General Assembly entities shall not advocate for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment."

A point that did not get much play in the press was the involvement of the secular, left-leaning Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Americans United organized the event, wrote the statement and recruited church involvement.



Elenora Giddings Ivory, head of the PCUSA's Washington lobby office, was one of several mainline church leaders to sign on to a statement opposing the Federal Marriage Amendment. Later, the PCUSA's General Assembly passed a resolution forbidding her and the Washington office from further lobbying on the issue.

STEPS FORWARD, BACKWARD

On July 14, the U.S. Senate considered the Federal Marriage Amendment. In the end, supporters of the FMA mustered only 48 votes for a procedural motion. While many of the FMA's critics saw this as a major victory, supporters saw it differently.

"We're just waiting for the trigger that will really awaken the American people to this issue," said Matt Daniels, president of the Alliance for Marriage. Until a significant challenge makes clear the effort to change the institution of marriage, the amendment will seem unnecessary.

Such challenges are growing. Several local governments earlier this year flouted state and federal laws in granting marriage licenses to homosexual couples. On August 12, the California Supreme Court voided such marriages in that state, saying to "all affected same-sex couples that the same-sex marriages authorized by the officials are void and of no legal effect." Same-sex marriage advocates seemed unfazed.

"This decision has nothing to do with the more than a dozen ongoing lawsuits around the country challenging the constitutionality of state laws that prohibit gay couples from getting married," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF).

The results in U.S. churches have also been mixed. The United Methodist Church, the second largest Protestant body in the United States, endorsed at its General Conference civil laws that define marriage as between one man and one woman. However, priests in the Episcopal Church, which last year tacitly endorsed the blessing of same-sex marriages, have continued to move forward with such blessings despite the present crisis within that denomination. Episcopal Bishop Otis Charles, who announced to the denomination that he was homosexual shortly after his retirement from the episcopacy, was married to his partner in a ceremony in the Diocese of California.

It is clear that churches have become an ever-more critical battleground over this particular issue as the supporters of same-sex marriage demand not only legal, but moral recognition for such unions. Like the electorate, many people in the pews are waiting for a presenting issue (like last summer's election of an openly homosexual bishop in the Episcopal Church) before rising to action. One suspects, however, that waiting too long for such an event may only result in the further fracturing of the U.S. churches. Let us hope otherwise.

SWEDISH PASTOR JAILED FOR OFFENDING HOMOSEXUALS

A Pentecostal preacher in Sweden was sentenced to a month in prison for offending homosexuals in a sermon, in violation of a Swedish law against "incitement."

In a 2003 sermon in Borgholm, Ake Green described homosexuality as "a horrible cancerous tumor in the body of society," and referred to homosexuals as "perverts, whose sexual drive the Devil has used as his strongest weapon against God." Green argued at trial that his intent was not to express disrespect for homosexuals, but to clarify the biblical view on homosexuality.

Soren Anderson, president of the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights, said in response to the court ruling that religious freedom could never be used as a reason to offend others. "I cannot regard this sentence as an act of interference with freedom of religion," Anderson commented.

Green is expected to appeal the court decision.

INDIAN CHRISTIANS FORCED TO CONVERT TO HINDUISM

Christian groups in India have condemned government officials for failing to stop a highly publicized ceremony reconverting 100 Christians in that country to Hinduism, in violation of a state law that restricts the conversion from one religion to another.

The conversion ceremony in the east Indian state of Orissa on September 19 was organized by the World Hindu Council, and held in the remote village of Sarat.

The Orissa Freedom Act bans conversions without prior consent of the government. Historically, it has been used by the government as a means to halt conversions to Christianity.

"[The Orissa government] is acting as if the anti-conversion law does not apply to Hindus," said the Rev. P. R. Parichcha, president of the All India Christian Council chapter in Orissa. "[The government] never misses an opportunity to harass Christians here."

"We are really concerned with the connivance of the state government in allowing the bigots to conduct such ceremonies," said

Sajan K. George, convenor of the Global Council of Indian Christians.

A similar conversion ceremony was held in February, with nearly 200 tribal Christians taking part. Christians in the region claimed that many of the conversions were produced under duress.

ECUMENICAL LEADERS AFFIRM NEED FOR UNITED NATIONS

The World Council of Churches has affirmed the "indispensable" role of the United Nations in a letter sent to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on September 4, 2004.

"We believe that the UN remains the indispensable instrument of the nations of the world if they are to remove the scourge of war from the earth and to establish the conditions for peace, notably: observance of human rights, a just sharing of the earth's resources, eliminating poverty and all forms of discrimination," said the letter, which was signed by the general secretaries of the regional ecumenical bodies composing the WCC. "...[W]e believe that the unique status of the UN in the eyes of all its member states must be restored, accompanied by a renewed respect for international law and the desire to solve conflicts by a truly multilateral approach. We are committing ourselves to promoting this view of the UN in our respective church constituencies."

The WCC letter also included an exhortation to reexamine the "inherited structures" of the UN so that they "adequately reflect the present realities and needs of the world as a whole."

VIETNAMESE CHRISTIANS PETITION GOVERNMENT FOR GREATER RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

A petition signed by representatives of over fifty house church and indigenous mission organizations was presented on September 27, 2004, to the Communist Party leadership in Hanoi, Vietnam. The petition is a response to a new law set to be implemented in November that will further restrict Christian worship in the communist country.

"As Vietnamese citizens, we express our respect for leaders of the various levels of government," said the petition, "for our Bible itself teaches that 'everyone must

submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established' (Rom. 13:1)." The petition also claimed that if Vietnamese Christians were forced to choose between following a government edict and the tenets of their faith, "we would follow the example of Christian believers through the ages...and say, 'We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29)."

The petition included a list of three suggestions for the government to improve relations between the government and its religious citizens. First, every citizen should be allowed to live equally under the constitution, regardless of belief. Second, the government should cease its discrimination against house church attendees. Third, favorable conditions should be created by the government to allow freedom of religious practice—specifically, that Christians should be allowed to choose "times and places of their convenience" for worship.

CHRISTIANS IN KENYA MARCH AGAINST ABORTION

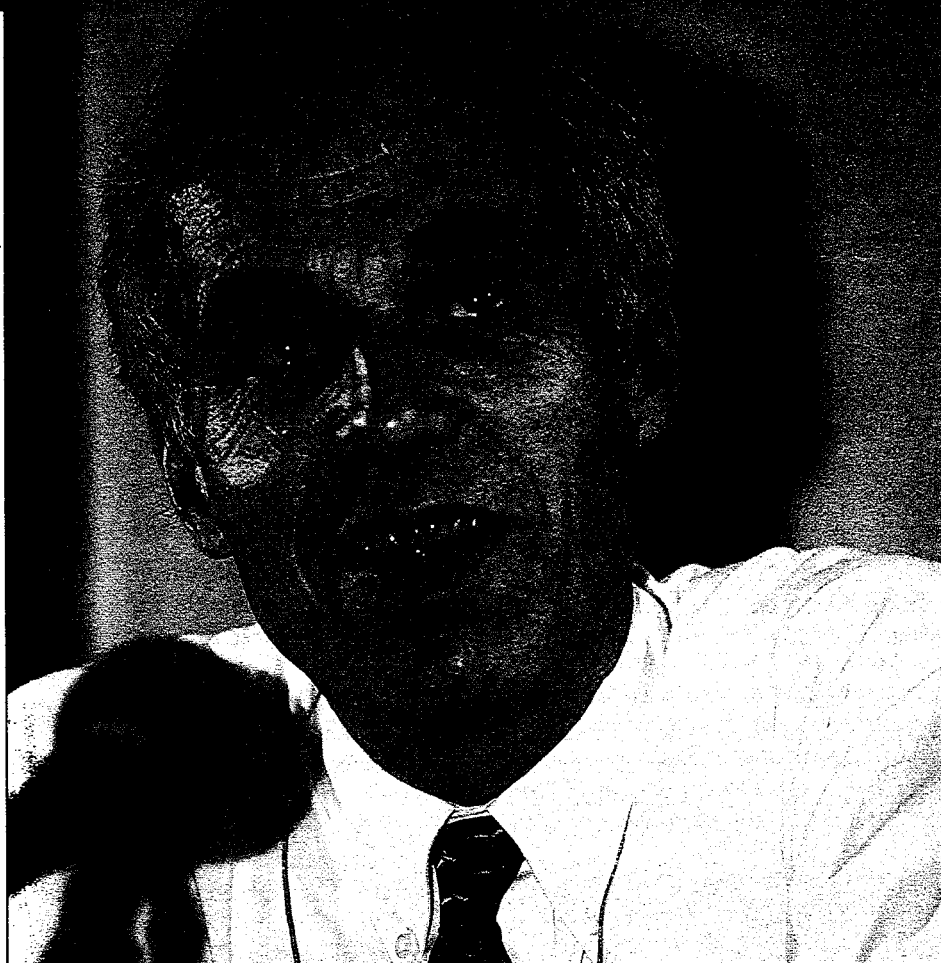
On August 14, Christians in towns and villages across Kenya marched in silence to protest the practice of abortion in that country, and to promote the sanctity of human life. The Roman Catholic Pro-Life Movement and the Protestant Protecting Life Movement organized the march jointly.

While abortion remains illegal in Kenya, abortion services are readily available, and legislation has been proposed legalizing the practice. Kenyan law allows for abortion in cases where the life of the mother is at risk.

"Abortion is murder. It should be condemned by all Christians," said the Rev. Hezekiah Muraya of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. "The problem is growing due to influence from the West, where groups are demanding its legalization. We are calling on churches to come together and debate it."

Fifteen aborted fetuses were found abandoned at a Nairobi residential estate in May, raising tensions between pro-life and pro-abortion forces.

Over 5,000 women are believed to die annually due to complications from abortion procedures.



In July, former World Council of Churches General Secretary Konrad Raiser apologized for the ecumenical movement's silence about human rights abuses in the Soviet bloc during the Cold War.

Gustavo Gutierrez, Oscar Romero, Ernesto Cardenal, and Erwin Kraeutler—and suggested Aristide be included in that list

Mbeki cited Luke 1:51-53 as an endorsement of Aristide's philosophy of wealth redistribution in Haiti: "He hat shewd strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hat put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hat filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

FORMER WCC LEADER ADMITS COLD WAR FAILINGS

The Rev. Konrad Raiser, the former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, has admitted that the organization he led from 1993 through 2003 failed to effectively support anti-communist movements in Eastern Europe during the Cold War era.

Speaking at a July 16-18 conference in Imshausen, Germany, Raiser acknowledged the WCC had "not sufficiently recognized" liberation movements such as Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia or Solidarity in Poland, instead choosing to focus on leftist insurgencies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

"While being aware of the situation and basically sympathetic to their struggle, the WCC gave priority attention to the struggles against racism and for justice and liberation in the southern countries," said Raiser.

Raiser noted that while the WCC and other ecumenical agencies had tried to include churches from within communist countries, "the ecumenical movement concentrated on bridge building and co-operation" instead of "prophetic protest."

"The lesson we learned was that effective action is scarcely possible without the active involvement of the local church," said Rev. John Arnold, a former president of the Conference of European Churches also in attendance at the conference. "I prefer to say simply, 'no, we did not do enough.'"

BRAZILIAN ELECTIONS REVEAL CONFLICTS AMONG CHRISTIANS

Roman Catholic leaders in Brazil expressed dismay at attempts by candidates to obtain support from evangelical churches in their political campaigns.

"It's regrettable that elections in Rio are taking place as a competition between religions," said the Rt. Rev. Dimas Lara Barbosa, Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Rio de Janeiro.

In a newspaper article prior to the election, the Liberal Party candidate for Mayor of Rio, Marcelo Crivella, claimed the Catholic Church was "elitist," while crediting evangelicals for standing with the poor.

Catholic leaders have also criticized evangelical churches for presenting their own candidates for election. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God alone offered over 500 candidates for municipal offices.

The Assemblies of God churches in Brazil were also accused by Catholic leaders of seeking to improve their political influence. The 14,400,000 member denomination endorsed a candidate for office in the northeastern state of Fortaleza.

Catholic priests have also gotten involved in municipal races. Despite strong language discouraging political involvement by priests, over forty priests ran for prefectures in the October 3 elections, while over 120 priests ran for other offices such as alderman.

SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT CLAIMS DEPOSED HAITIAN PRESIDENT "INSPIRED" BY GOSPEL

President Thabo Mbeki praised Jean-Bertrand Aristide upon welcoming the exiled Haitian President to South Africa, claiming the former Caribbean strongman was inspired by biblical teachings, and comparing him favorably to the most prominent liberation theology proponents in Latin America.

"From his election in 1990, President Aristide and other patriots have been engaged in a complex and difficult struggle to establish the stable democratic system that has eluded the first black republic since its birth 200 years ago," said Mbeki. Mbeki listed a long line of "outstanding progressive thinkers within the Roman Catholic Church"—including Helder Camara,

Guiding the Faithful

Church Agency Voter Guides and the 2004 Presidential Election

by Steve Rempe & Alan F.H. Wisdom

In the 2004 election, many churches had to decide what to say to their members on matters of public policy. Some took no notice of the election, as if it had no connection to the Gospel that is preached from the pulpit. Other churches were content to urge civic responsibility in a general sense, with non-partisan prayers for voters and candidates. Still others were more active in promoting positions on a short or long list of issues.

Several of the more activist denominational agencies and ecumenical groups produced election-year guides to help members think through their choices in the voting booth. These voter guides differed greatly in tone and detail. Some concentrated on presenting church teachings on a just social order. Others offered an analysis of key current issues to which church members were supposed to give the greatest weight. Still others compared the positions of the candidates, often with the unstated purpose of showing one candidate or party to be more closely aligned with the church's convictions.

The following analysis examines a diverse sampling of these guides, based on four criteria.

FOUR CRITERIA

The first thing to be examined is the guide's reliance on authoritative church teachings. Is the Bible used as the standard by which all the voting principles are measured? Does the guide refer to historic church documents, catechisms, encyclicals, or other authoritative sources where applicable?

Any church voter guide should also show some awareness of the views of church members. Especially in cases where the denomination supposedly has a representative form of government, it makes a difference whether the members actually support the "official" position.

Third, an effective voter guide would examine a broad range of issues, reflecting God's concern for all aspects of human life. Given a sufficiently broad range of issues, it is likely that the church's convictions would not align precisely with any political party. Some of those convictions might be seen in sharp contradiction to stands taken by one or more parties; however, no party would merit an unqualified endorsement.

Finally, a distinction should be made between two very different levels of authority—on the one hand, the higher authority

of principles directly taught in the Bible and tradition; on the other hand, the prudential judgments by which those principles are applied in political life.

CHURCH GUIDES

Official denominational guides usually work at maintaining an air of objectivity. Actual candidates are not mentioned by name, although partisan preferences can often be read between the lines.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) guide, *Christian & Citizen*, divides the issues into eleven categories, listed alphabetically to avoid the appearance of favoring one issue over another.

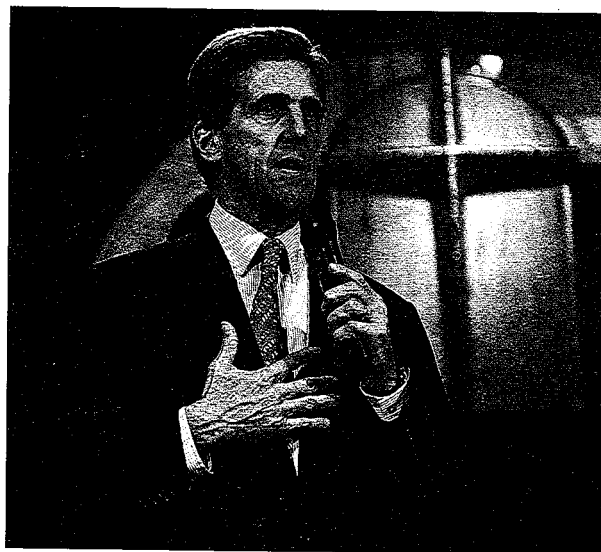
While not specifically citing any pending legislation or party platform, the recommendations in *Christian & Citizen* are consistently liberal. The guide chooses to focus on resolutions from previous PCUSA General Assemblies, rather than basing its positions on the Scriptures or the PCUSA confessions of faith. It does not distinguish the lower level of authority that should be attached to General Assembly pronouncements on legislative details, as opposed to confessional expositions of basic Presbyterian doctrines.

The result is a document that takes strong liberal stances on a raft of issues: abolition of the death penalty, strict gun control laws, unlimited access to safe and publicly-funded abortions, progressive taxation,

reduced military spending, campaign finance reform, support for the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, support for embryonic stem cell research, the creation of a cabinet-level "Department of Peace," and reconciliation with Castro's Cuba, among others. By contrast, the Presbyterian guide soft-pedals issues of concern to conservative Presbyterians. Gambling in the United States and religious persecution worldwide go unmentioned in the document.

The PCUSA guide shows a sharp tilt to the political left. It is fundamentally weak in its scriptural and confessional grounding, and it fails to reflect the diversity of thinking among Presbyterians.

Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention offers a much more conservative take on the issues. The SBC, through the For Faith and Family ministry of its Ethics and Religious Liberty



Commission, initiated a campaign named *ivotevalues.com* urging voters to “vote their values” on selected issues. The issues mentioned by name (abortion, bio-medical issues, euthanasia, gambling, “homosexual agenda,” religious liberty) tend to be ones on which the SBC encourages a stance more in line with the Republican Party. The language used by the guide in describing positions leaves little doubt on which side of the ledger the Southern Baptist Convention resides. Readers are told that the abortion rights movement is “cleverly disguised as ‘pro-choice,’” while being in reality “pro-death.” The guide remarks that legalized gambling “hurts the poor” and “encourages crime.”

The use of Scripture is much more prominent in the *ivotevalues.com* materials in comparison to the PCUSA document. However, all of the biblical citations are used to encourage civic engagement and prayer for the upcoming election. None of the particular issues raised by the guide is accompanied by a Scripture passage. Instead, voters are reminded: “When the godly are in authority, the people rejoice. But when the wicked are in power, they groan” (Proverbs 29:2). It is left up to the individual to determine which candidates might qualify as “godly.”

In the SBC materials, the connection between Scripture and various stances on issues is not made explicit. The guide addresses a narrow range of issues. It appears to reflect the views of Southern Baptists in general.

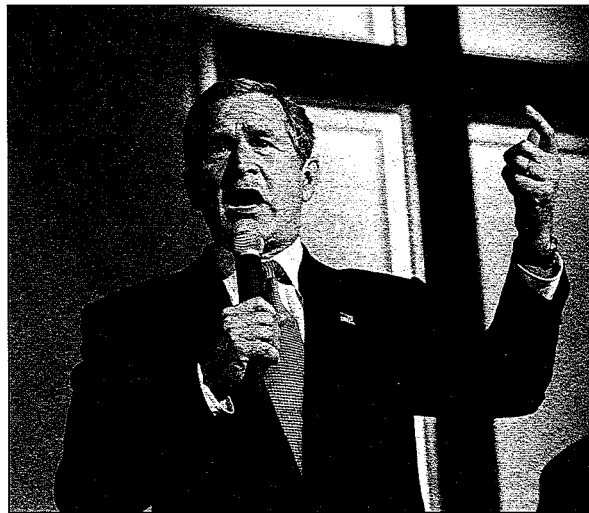
United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society. In *The United Methodist Church and the 2004 Election: Comparing the Issues*, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) seeks to analyze the statements and positions of several presidential candidates by comparing them to the UMC’s “platform of sorts”—its *Social Principles and Resolutions*.

The UMC positions stated are not annotated, giving readers no easy way to check whether the GBCS is accurately summarizing the relevant principles and resolutions. Nor is there any mention of the Bible or the *Book of Discipline* (except for the above reference to the *Social Principles*), which is supposed to have more authority in the United Methodist Church than resolutions.

The Methodist guide claims “there is often a schism between what the Church says and what individual Christians support.” The use of the pejorative term “schism” implies some condemnation of individual Methodists who take positions contrary to those presented by the Board of Church and Society. Apparently, the board is aiming to rectify the “selfish priorities” of such dissident Methodists.

According to the guide, “the positions of George W. Bush and John F. Kerry are derived from their own statements as well as the platforms of their respective parties. President Bush’s actions in the last four years are also presented.” However, by “presenting” Bush’s actions, the GBCS issues itself a license to frame his positions with language inviting criticism of those actions. By contrast, the language describing Kerry’s positions—derived entirely from his campaign literature—is filled with the kind of “spin” designed to negate any criticism.

The guide makes no attempt to “pres-



ent” Kerry’s 20-year voting record in the Senate. Where some would see a conflict between the voting record and the campaign literature (e.g., Kerry voted against all serious attempts to curb partial-birth abortions, yet his campaign literature claimed he opposes to the practice), the campaign literature is cited as definitive.

It should also be noted that the guide is very selective in deciding which Methodist policies are to be highlighted. At the 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the language describing the church’s view on marriage and sexuality was strengthened. There can be no doubt

that the denomination honors marriage as the union of one man and one woman, that it favors civil laws upholding that definition of marriage, and that it opposes “same-sex marriages,” “same-sex unions,” and other devices to confer moral approval upon homosexual conduct. These stances, however, do not appear in the GBCS guide. While it is asserted that both candidates opposed “same-sex marriage,” there is no acknowledgement that the United Methodist Church maintains the exact same position. As big as this issue was in the 2004 campaign, it is exceedingly hard to imagine that this omission was a mere oversight by the GBCS.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. A politically centrist approach is presented in *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, a voting guide issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). *Faithful Citizenship* is divided into seven basic principles to be considered by Catholic voters:

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Caring for God’s Creation

In contrast to the PCUSA and SBC materials, *Faithful Citizenship* emphasizes that “a Catholic framework...does not fit the rigid ideologies of ‘right’ or ‘left,’ or the platform of any party.” The guide provides ten questions for voters to ask of any potential candidate, with the hope that “these questions...can lead to less cynicism and more participation, less partisanship, and more civil dialogue on fundamental issues.”

The guide is consistent with the long-standing Catholic position on the sanctity of life, declaring, “The deliberate killing of a human being before birth is never morally acceptable.” The guide also urges the abandonment of capital punishment in the United States, citing Pope John Paul II’s statement that the death penalty is “both cruel and unnecessary.”

A criticism of previous voter guides published by the USCCB has been that all the issues raised were treated the same, as if they were of equal importance. (A voter guide by the independent group Catholic Answers sought to remedy this defect by proposing five "non-negotiable issues"—abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem-cell research, human cloning, and homosexual "marriage.") However, the placement of life issues at the beginning of the 2004 document, and the strong language used on those issues, reflects the importance given them by the bishops. By comparison, the language used regarding economic issues ("...it is important that just wages be paid to those who work to support their families..." "...we support efforts to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid...") is less authoritative, allowing for different approaches in accomplishing these objectives.

Faithful Citizenship incorporates both church statements and Scripture passages, with extensive annotation. While the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church makes lay opinion less influential in determining church policy, the bishops' statement is actually more open in acknowledging divisions among the faithful than is the voter guide produced by the ostensibly more democratic PCUSA. The Catholic document covers a broad range of issues, while distinguishing between levels of importance.

MULTI-DENOMINATIONAL GUIDES

National Council of Churches. In April, the National Council of Churches (NCC) released a voter guide entitled *Christian Principles in an Election Year*. *Christian Principles* offers ten guidelines to be considered when electing a candidate for office. While many of the points raised in the guidelines are legitimate, they are spun in a way that allows only for a liberal response.

The first principle in the list—"war is contrary to the will of God"—is a good example. On a certain level, this assertion is true—God did not create humans with the intention that they be at war with one another. But, without qualification, the statement does not adequately represent the mainstream of Christian teaching. It does not recognize sin as the underlying

cause of human conflict, nor the possibility that sometimes force might be necessary to restrain the evils caused by sin. Clearly, the inclusion of this principle as first on the NCC's list suggests a condemnation of President Bush, who has sent U.S. troops into Afghanistan and Iraq.

Another stretch is evident in the eighth point—"those who follow Christ are called to heal the sick." While few Christians would debate this point, many would question the NCC's interpretation—that "we look for leaders who will support adequate, affordable, and accessible health care for all." Again, a basic Christian duty is being used to promote a specific legislative agenda that does not necessarily follow.

But perhaps the biggest problem with the NCC guide is what it fails to address. Point 5 proclaims, "Each human being is created in the image of God and is of infinite worth." The comment is used as a

But perhaps the biggest problem with the NCC guide is what it fails to address.

justification for promoting racial justice and equal opportunity—clearly something that Christians should support. However, the fact that abortion is unmentioned in a principle about the value of human life indicates an unwillingness to deal with an issue that is of vital importance to a large segment of the Christian population. This reticence illustrates the deep divide within NCC denominations on this issue.

It should also be noted that the NCC *Principles*, while reciting numerous moral platitudes, fail to cite even one Scripture reference. Thus, while continually claiming that "God calls us to..." "Christians have a biblical mandate to..." "Those who follow Christ are called to..." the NCC never tells us where it is that God makes these calls upon us.

The NCC guide does not make explicit its authoritative sources in Scripture or church teaching. It addresses fairly broad principles, but omits some important topics. It clearly neglects the diversity among members of its constituent organizations.

National Association of Evangelicals. The National Association of Evangelicals' (NAE) *Candidate Comparison* examines the two major party candidates for president and their stated positions on a wide range of issues.

There is no advocacy in the NAE document. The selection of issues extended beyond those usually associated with Evangelicals, including such diverse issues as the environment, health care, and the federal deficit. The positions cited are not editorialized, but rather are matter-of-fact recitations of the candidates' own statements.

The guide's impartiality is both a strength and a weakness. In presenting an unbiased recitation of the candidate positions, the NAE has produced a guide that, while valuable, has little, save an introductory paragraph on Christian citizenship, to indicate that a Christian group produced the document. No Scripture is referenced, and there is no acknowledgement of the various church traditions that comprise the membership of the NAE. There is little guidance provided in the guide to help Christian voters discern which issues are most important, and how to apply basic Christian teachings to those issues.

To its credit, the NAE has also issued *For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility*, a statement examining the importance of Christian engagement in civil society. This document was drafted by a diverse collection of evangelical scholars and activists, including IRD president Diane Knippers. It looks more deeply at the reasons for entering the political arena as Christians and provides some guidance from the Bible and church teachings. It provides Christians with the broader principles that can be applied to the specific races and issues mentioned in the voter guide. Used concurrently, these two resources are capable of providing the insight and balance lacking in many of the other guides.

Ultimately, Christians will have to rely on knowledge of issues and candidates, a grasp of Christian doctrine, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in determining their votes. Church groups have the unique opportunity to inform and instruct their members in these matters, encouraging a strong sense of civic responsibility and moral engagement. Sadly, most of these voter guides are a missed opportunity to encourage true citizenship. Most either reduce Christian activism to barely disguised partisanship, or else they fail to provide needed instruction and guidance on complex issues.

Presbyterians in a Muddle over Marriage

by Alan F.H. Wisdom

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as a "mainline" American denomination, is in the thick of the battles over marriage and family that are shaking U.S. society. And IRD's Presbyterian Action committee was in the midst of the action, defending the church's traditional teaching on marriage, at the 2004 PCUSA General Assembly.

The results of that Assembly, June 26–July 3 in Richmond, VA, were inconclusive and contradictory. On the one hand, General Assembly commissioners approved a new denominational policy statement that "affirms that marriage is instituted by God, that marriage is good for human society, and that marriage is a form of family life that provides a suitable context for the nurture of children." On the other hand, the same commissioners refused to endorse *A Christian Declaration on Marriage*, which would have joined the PCUSA to Roman Catholics and Evangelicals in declaring, "We believe that marriage is a holy union of one man and one woman in which they commit, with God's help, to build a loving, life-giving, faithful relationship that will last for a lifetime."

The Richmond Assembly reaffirmed the denomination's definition of marriage as "a civil contract between a woman and a man." But it rejected attempts to secure the preservation of that definition under civil law. Commissioners passed a motion stating that the Assembly took no position on the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment.

So does the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) aim to support or undermine traditional one man/one woman marriage? The answer depends upon where one looks. If one looks in the PCUSA constitution, the answer seems clear. The Westminster Confession, the classic standard of Presbyterian doctrine, presents a very high view of marriage: "Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter..."

The actions of PCUSA General Assemblies give a more ambiguous answer. A 1996 Assembly resolution started by "affirm[ing] the

Presbyterian Church's historic definition of marriage as 'a civil contract between a woman and a man.'" [The quote comes from the PCUSA *Book of Order*.] The resolution went on to advocate "legislation in favor of giving civil rights to same-sex partners." But, of course, such "partnerships" are designed to be replicas of marriage in everything but name. Promoting them dissolves every real distinction between marriage and other self-defined "committed" relationships.

The denomination's Permanent Judicial Commission, in a 2000 ruling, pushed the inconsistency to a new extreme. It permitted "same-sex unions" to be conducted by Presbyterian ministers and in Presbyterian churches. The judicial commission imposed, however, several conditions: that a same-sex ceremony should not be regarded as "the equivalent of a marriage," that ministers "should not appropriate specific liturgical forms from services of Christian marriage," and

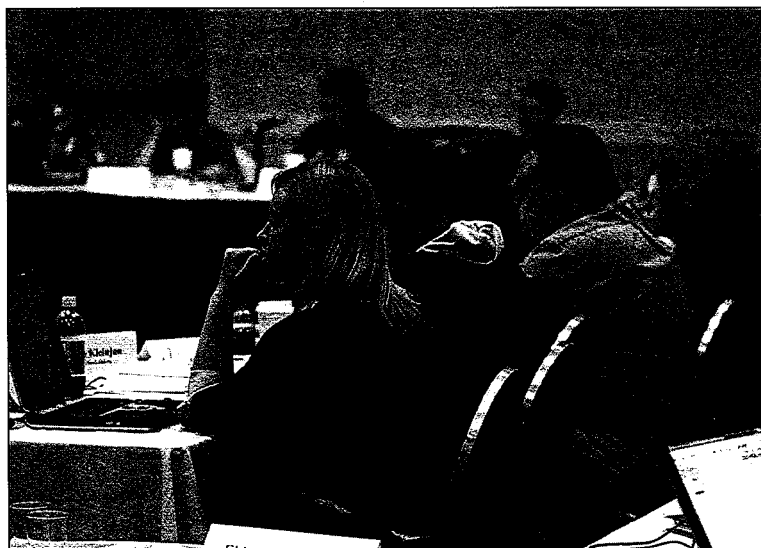
that the ceremony "should not be construed as an endorsement of homosexual conjugal practice." But the reality is that almost every Presbyterian minister and church that celebrates same-sex unions does regard them as equivalent to marriages, does borrow from the wedding liturgy, and does intend to convey a blessing upon sexual relations between the two partners.

REWRITING AN EXTREME PROPOSAL

A new debate was ignited in 2003 by a proposed PCUSA policy statement on *Families in Transition*. The proposal, issuing from the denomination's Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP),

would have endorsed "all forms of family" as "instruments that open us to service and participation in the larger community as servants of God." It refused to grant any "privilege" to Christian marriage, or to attach any "stigma" to sexual relations and childbearing outside of marriage.

Presbyterian Action took a leading role in mustering opposition to *Families in Transition*. Its director, Alan Wisdom, published a critique of the proposal in the journal *Theology Matters*. He also helped to rally Assembly commissioners against *Families in Transition*. A group on the 2003 Assembly Committee on National Issues proposed a substitute motion that strongly affirmed marriage and rejected sexual relationships outside of marriage. In the end, the full 2003 Assembly



Members of the National Issues Committee deliberated over endorsing the *Christian Declaration on Marriage*, which was signed by Southern Baptists, Roman Catholics and others. The Assembly refused to endorse "A Christian Declaration on Marriage," by a 290-226 margin.

referred both the original proposal and the substitute motion back to ACSWP for further work.

ACSWP, in an unusual move, invited Wisdom to join its writing team to develop a new families policy for the 2004 Assembly. Wisdom was assigned to draft the conclusions for the proposal, retitled "Transforming Families." ACSWP also asked the denomination's Theology Office, a relatively more orthodox body, to draft the opening biblical and theological section of the new proposal.

The result, after many struggles on the writing team and within ACSWP, was a document that won broad approval. *Transforming Families* received a unanimous vote in the 2004 National Issues Committee, and it was adopted by a 482-23 vote in the full Assembly.

"The church upholds the meaning and significance of marriage between a man and a woman," according to the new policy statement, "but it does not denigrate other forms of family life that demonstrate and nurture godly character."

Transforming Families drew on the Genesis accounts of creation, the Confession of 1967, and the Presbyterian lit-

urgy for Christian marriage to explicate the purposes and blessings of marriage. It also cited "sociological data indicating that a loving, lasting marriage of the mother and father is the most successful (90 percent) context for children's flourishing."

The policy statement committed the denomination "to make coordinated efforts to prepare couples for marriage, assist couples in their marriages, reconcile their conflicts where possible, avoid divorce in non-destructive marriages, and seek healthy outcomes for all who experience divorce."

The document stressed the "marital equality" of husband and wife. "Subordination is replaced by mutuality," it said, "for 'there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28)." The statement lifted up New Testament teachings portraying adoption as "the image both for human relationship to God and for the establishment of familial ties among those who are brothers and sisters through adoption."

Transforming Families criticized "cultural values of materialism, consumerism,

individualism, and hedonism" which "threaten the well-being of all families." It also spoke of economic pressures that add to the stresses in family life. The statement urged Christians to work for "social transformation" in the conditions of family life. "In particular, children can be nurtured to become suspicious of prevailing cultural attitudes towards wealth, consumption, entertainment, and sexual self-indulgence."

The document encouraged employers "to offer more flexible work hours, more paid leave for the care of dependent persons and child-related activities, more telecommuting options, more possibilities for part-time jobs with pro-rated wages and benefits, family-supporting wages for all workers, and more available, affordable, and flexible child care programs."

Many amendments to *Transforming Families* were attempted in the National Issues Committee, although only two significant ones passed. The first inserted the phrase "that demonstrate and nurture godly

Some could embrace ecumenical statements made together with the liberal United Church of Christ and Episcopal Church, but not with the more conservative (and far larger) Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches.

character" to describe the "other forms of family life" that the church "does not denigrate." The second asserted, "Parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to care for their children." Both these amendments stressed points of biblical teaching—the warnings against ungodly forms of family, and the admonitions directed particularly to parents—that were otherwise obscure in *Transforming Families*. All efforts to weaken biblical emphases in the document were defeated.

There were, however, some important points that remained vague in the final version of *Transforming Families*. The policy statement, while upholding marriage within the church, said little about the status of marriage in civil society. It was also ambiguous about sexual relationships outside of marriage. Amendments to repair these weaknesses were rejected by the National Issues Committee. Several commissioners explained that they wanted to "leave room" for homosexual relationships to be accepted and redefined as "marriages."

STAYING APART FROM THE ECUMENICAL MARRIAGE MOVEMENT

Another way in which the deficiencies in *Transforming Families* might have been remedied would have been through an endorsement of *A Christian Declaration on Marriage*. That one-page statement expressed concisely and directly several points that were not so apparent in the 50-page PCUSA document.

The declaration warned, "Our nation is threatened by a high divorce rate, a rise in cohabitation, a rise in non-marital births, a decline in the marriage rate, and a diminishing interest in and readiness for marrying." It called on "churches throughout America to do their part to strengthen marriage in our nation." Among the means recommended were: "prayer and spiritual support for stronger marriages; encouragement for people to marry; education for young people about the meaning and responsibility of marriage; preparation for those engaged to be married; pastoral care,

including qualified mentor couples, for couples at all stages of their relationship; help for couples experiencing marital difficulty and

disruption; and influence within society and the culture to uphold the institution of marriage."

An overture to endorse *A Christian Declaration* came from two presbyteries in Southern California, with support from Presbyterian Action. It noted that the declaration had already been signed by top officials of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the National Association of Evangelicals. According to the overture, the declaration "expresses an appreciation of marriage that is shared by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), along with virtually every major branch of the Christian tradition."

A commissioner championing the overture saw it as a major ecumenical outreach, linking the PCUSA to a broad "marriage movement" that bridged many theological and ideological divides. "Adoption of this overture would enable us to join hands with more than 50 denominations and 100 million Christians," proclaimed Minister Commissioner Don Wade from Atlanta.

But other commissioners resisted Wade's vision of a new ecumenism. "I have a difficulty with the ecumenism in this document [the marriage declaration] because it's not with the 'usual suspects,'" commented Minister Commissioner Deborah DeBoer from Northern New York. She could embrace ecumenical statements made together with the liberal United Church of Christ and Episcopal Church, but not with the more conservative (and far larger) Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches.

Other speakers loosed an avalanche of accusations against the declaration: that it was somehow inconsistent with Presbyterian theology; that it contained the Roman Catholic teaching on marriage as a sacrament or the Southern Baptist teaching on "gracious submission" of wives to husbands; that it would put pressure on single people to marry; that it would "require married couples to procreate and condemn those who can't"; that it would "encourage women to stay in abusive marriages."

Advocates of the overture rebutted these false charges time after time. But opponents never let up in their attacks on the marriage declaration. Perhaps the deepest reason lying behind this fierce opposition emerged in the final speech before the full Assembly's vote. Minister Ann Richards from Oregon explained: "At this point in history, I am not prepared to say marriage is limited to a man and a woman." The Assembly refused to endorse *A Christian Declaration on Marriage*, by a 290-226 margin.

NO POSITION ON FEDERAL MARRIAGE AMENDMENT

A new front of controversy opened at the Richmond Assembly regarding the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment. Previously, the PCUSA had no stated position on that amendment. The 2002 General Assembly had turned down a commissioners' resolution to endorse the amendment; however, it did not approve any statement opposing the amendment.

Nevertheless, the denomination's Washington lobbying office had mounted a concerted campaign against the Federal Marriage Amendment. At a March 3, 2004, press conference, Washington Office Director ~~Blaine Giddings~~ Ivory declared, "We urge Congress to reject this amendment." Ivory claimed that "Presbyterian Church General Assemblies have affirmed the civil right of

same-sex couples to civil marriage." Therefore, she said, "the states should permit gay and lesbian couples access to the civil status of civil marriage." The Washington Office director asserted that, in denying the status of marriage to same-sex couples, the Federal Marriage Amendment "would restrict the civil rights of millions of Americans."

Minister Commissioners William Teng from National Capital Presbytery and Patricia Mason from Pittsburgh were upset by this unauthorized advocacy. So they introduced a resolution at the Richmond Assembly to reverse the stand taken by Ivory. Their resolution reaffirmed the definition of marriage, as found in the PCUSA Book of Order, and expressed "the desire of the church to see that definition safeguarded in civil law by all appropriate means, including the Federal Marriage Amendment now proposed in Congress."

Teng told the National Issues Committee that "the purpose [of the Federal Marriage Amendment] is to defend marriage." He warned that "a small contingent of activist judges are redefining marriage for the rest of society." He maintained that the amendment was necessary "to move the debate about marriage away from the judges and back to the people."

Soon after Teng introduced his resolution, a member of the committee offered a substitute motion. Minister Commissioner Don Baird from Sacramento proposed the following language: "Nothing the 216th General Assembly (2004) has said or acted upon is to be construed to state or imply a position for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment. General Assembly entities shall not advocate for or against the Federal Marriage Amendment." Baird explained: "This is a very volatile and divisive issue. I'd like to see us not act on this divisive issue." He added his concern that "if this resolution [Teng's] does not pass, I do not want it to be construed that we are against marriage." Baird's substitute motion passed on a 41-19 vote in the committee, and on a 299-192 vote in the full Assembly.

The marriage amendment came up for debate in the U.S. Senate in mid-July. After the General Assembly action, it appeared that the PCUSA Washington Office would not be taking sides in that debate. But in fact, as late as July 12, a letter opposing the amendment was still being distributed with Ivory's signature. In September, a Washington Office

guide for Presbyterian voters contained inaccurate and contradictory information, asserting that the PCUSA supported "the right of same-gender persons to civil marriage" while also endorsing the Federal Marriage Amendment.

DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE REAFFIRMED, BARELY

Presbyterians and politicians are still scratching their heads about where the denomination stands on marriage. The confusion might have been even greater if the Richmond Assembly had not adopted a last-minute amendment reaffirming the PCUSA's constitutional definition of marriage. The amendment borrowed a phrase from the aforementioned 1996 resolution in "affirm[ing] the Presbyterian Church's historic definition of marriage as 'a civil contract between a woman and a man.'"

This amendment was inserted into a commissioners' resolution to "recognize civil rights for same-gender couples." The resolution, as reshaped by the National Issues Committee, urged "state legislations [sic] to change state laws to include the right of same-gender persons to civil union." Likewise, it asked the U.S. Congress to "recognize those state laws that allow same-gender union."

In the plenary session, Minister Commissioner David McKechnie from Houston offered the crucial amendment to reaffirm the definition of marriage. He explained: "The committee passed this resolution, as amended, on the advice of resource people that it was simply repeating past policy in favor of civil rights for same-sex couples. But that past policy, a 1996 General Assembly resolution, also had another part. It reaffirmed the church's historic definition of marriage as 'a civil contract between a woman and a man,' citing the *Book of Order*. I would like to see that same balance restored to this resolution in 2004."

McKechnie's amendment passed on a 290-244 vote. Then the whole resolution, as amended, was approved on a 386-122 vote.

Where these actions leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not clear. But IRD's Presbyterian Action committee will remain in the midst of the Presbyterian debates over marriage. We particularly intend to press Ms. Ivory of the PCUSA Washington Office to rectify her pattern of unauthorized statements misrepresenting the denomination's teachings. ❖

Vietnam Cracks Down on Christians

by Faith McDonnell

In September 2004, Secretary Colin Powell named Vietnam a *Country of Particular Concern* (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act. This action indicated that the United States considers Vietnam a particularly severe violator of religious freedom, prompting some action in response. This is the first time that Vietnam has received this designation. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom had recommended CPC for Vietnam to the State Department since 2001, when Vietnam's crack-down on Christians was uncovered.

The CPC designation is well deserved. Following in the steps of that great bastion of persecution, the former Soviet Union, and other current communist regimes, Vietnam has severely restricted the freedom of Christians and other religious believers, such as Buddhists. Recently, the entire leadership of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam was placed under "temple arrest." And in the past few years the communist state has more and more brutally persecuted Christians from Vietnam's tribal minorities, the Hmongs and Montagnards.

The fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, brought immeasurable pain and devastation to the South Vietnamese. But the Vietnamese Communists focused on the Church with special animosity, closing churches and seizing Bible schools and other Christian institutions for other uses. Many Christian leaders were killed, like the parents of Mrs. Hieu Kennedy.

As a young girl in Vietnam, circa 1976, Mrs. Kennedy watched helplessly as her father was dragged from their home, beaten, and buried alive. Later, when authorities realized that her mother was also an outspoken Christian, she was taken too. This hostility, leveled at Protestant pastors, Roman Catholic priests and bishops, and lay people of all denominations, forced many Christians underground. To this day, a major part of the Church is comprised of unregistered Protestant and Catholic house churches.

As is true in many countries where the Church is persecuted, the status of religious freedom looks better on paper than in reality. The Vietnamese government boasts that both the constitution and government decrees guarantee freedom of worship. Yet Christian worship is regulated and tightly controlled in state-sanctioned churches, while both Protestant and Catholic house church members face arrest, torture, imprisonment, and other forms of persecution. Many Christians are also persecuted for daring to expose these

abuses to the outside world. Yet they continue courageously to raise their voices in spite of the danger.

Most recently, Christians have been speaking out about a new law that will provide local authorities with further legal basis to restrict and persecute the church. On June 18 in Hanoi, the Standing Committee of the Vietnam National Assembly passed an "Ordinance Regarding Religious Beliefs and Religious Organizations" that is scheduled to come into effect this November 15. Both Protestant and Catholic Christians in Vietnam have dared to speak out about the injustice of this new law and have asked the ordinance be withdrawn.

The Vietnam Evangelical Fellowship, an association of unregistered house churches, declared that the ordinance will "create many problems and disadvantages for the church...and at the same time it will highly likely, permanently outlaw our house churches that have not been recognized since 1975." Vietnamese Catholic priests Chan Tin, Nguyen Huu Gai, and Phan Van Loi expose the new ordinance as "a tool of the State to oppress people of faith." They explain that

although the ordinance purports to assure all citizens the right of freedom of religion, "it binds all religious activities of all religions to be submissive to the control of the State and entirely subservient to the State."

By making such public statements, Christians risk imprisonment. Father Tin, now 84 years old, spent some years in "village arrest" in the 1990s in punishment for a controversial Easter sermon entitled "Repentance for the Nation." Fathers Gai and Loi are colleagues of one of Vietnam's most well known Christian prisoners, Father Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly.

In February 2001, Father Ly was invited to Washington by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to testify at a hearing on Vietnam. Because he was denied permission to leave the country, Father Ly courageously submitted written testimony to the commission. He urged the United States to place pressure on Vietnam and to reject a U.S.-Vietnam trade pact because of Vietnam's human rights abuses. Within days the Vietnamese government issued an order for his administrative detention. In May 2001, hundreds of police surrounded and stormed his church and took him to prison. Later that year, in a two-hour closed trial, he was sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment and five years of house arrest for "undermining state unity and violating a previously issued detention order." He has never been given access to an attorney.

Another well known prisoner of faith is the Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang, general secretary of the banned Mennonite Church



Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, General Secretary of the banned Mennonite Church in Vietnam, faces a twenty-year prison sentence for his vociferous criticism of the human rights abuses by the government of Vietnam.

in Vietnam. Quang, a human rights activist and attorney, was arrested in June 2004 after publicly criticizing the government of Vietnam for arresting and beating four Mennonite elders. According to Compass Direct, a news service for the persecuted church, sources in Vietnam say that authorities are trying to build a legal case against Quang that could carry a sentence of up to twenty years in prison. Along with a female evangelist who was arrested in July, Quang and the elders have come to be known as the "Mennonite Six."

Special targets of the Vietnamese government have been the Hmong and Montagnard (also known as Degar) people, aboriginal hill tribes from the central highlands. The Hmong and Montagnard people are also hated by the Vietnamese government because of their connection to the United States. Save the Montagnards, founded by U.S. Special Forces veterans of the Vietnam War (www.montagnards.org), calls the Montagnards "the most enduring war allies in American history." A September

2002 editorial in *The Washington Times* said of the Montagnards, those indigenous, largely Christianized tribal

people from Vietnam's central highlands were true friends of American soldiers during the Vietnam War, and they paid a terrible price. More than 50 percent of adult Montagnard males were killed alongside American soldiers during the Vietnam War." The Hmong were also allies in the Vietnam War, and consequently were marked for extermination by the Northern Vietnamese.

In recent years, communist officials have launched many campaigns to eradicate Christianity from the central highlands. They are attempting to force the tribal people to renounce their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, saying that this "illegal religion" leads to divisions in the country. The authorities demand that the Hmong and Montagnard people return to their native religion—rebuild ancestral altars, sacrifice water buffalo, and worship spirits. When the Christians refuse, they are arrested and imprisoned. They have been tortured, injected with painful drugs, and beaten to death.

According to the Montagnard Foundation, in October 2002, Vietnamese

authorities executed a Christian preacher, Y-Het Nie Kdam, and two other Montagnard Christians. The foundation's press release reported that the three "were murdered with lethal injections...in their cells at Buonmathuot's prison. According to the press release, the three Christians "died in convulsing spasms within minutes" in punishment for their participation in peaceful demonstrations held in February 2001 and for being Christians.

Hmong Christians are similarly treated. In March of 2004, the Center for Religious Freedom received documentation of torture by injection. In a letter, Zong Xiong Hang, a Hmong Christian, describes the use of painful drug injections administered by Vietnamese military personnel in order to force Hmong in Na Ling Village "to not believe in Jesus." Those injected reported experiencing chest pains, headaches, and numbness in their limbs. Other Hmong Christians have been internally displaced. In September 2004, International Christian Concern received news that 96 Christian

Special targets of the Vietnamese government have been the Hmong and Montagnard people, aboriginal hill tribes from the central highlands.

families (about 600 people) had been forced from their village in Lao Cai Province to Binh Thuan Province, about 800 miles to the south. In the new province they have insufficient land to settle and grow food. Because there are no wells with clean drinking water, many of the people are suffering from diarrhea. Some have also contracted malaria as they were required to leave behind their mosquito netting (and all of their belongings except their clothing) when they were forced to relocate.

Hmong and Montagnard Christians have been imprisoned and killed. Hmong prisoner Mua Say So is the brother of a Christian who died from police beatings in August 2002. After seeking justice for his brother, he was sentenced in April 2003 to three years in prison for murdering his brother and falsely accusing the police. The ten-year-old son of a Hmong Christian leader was found murdered in April 2003. It was believed he was beaten to death by a local man when he would not reveal his father's whereabouts when the communist authorities were searching for him.

The most horrific event of 2004 in Vietnam was the Easter massacre of Montagnards. On Saturday, April 10, approximately 150,000 Christian Montagnards staged peaceful demonstrations of prayer in the four provinces of the central highlands in response to the political oppression and religious persecution they experience. According to the Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam (CRFV), the demonstrators were attacked by soldiers, police, and even other Vietnamese civilians. They were shot, beaten with electric batons, and stoned. Estimations of the number killed vary, but CRFV reports that "despite the ongoing attempts by the Government to minimize the gravity of the events, we take the responsibility to say that—at least—hundreds of people have been murdered." They add that the Vietnamese government rapidly organized a cover up of the massacre, blocking the access of all foreigners to the region.

Perhaps it was the Easter massacre of Christians in Vietnam that finally cast the deciding vote for CPC designation by the United States government. The gravity of Vietnam's abuse of human rights and re-

ligious freedom has been made clear, and now it is time for these abuses to be fully addressed. There are many ways that the United States can play a role in pressuring Vietnam to grant true religious freedom (as opposed to the new ordinance). The CPC designation is a good start. In addition, for the third time in as many years, U.S. Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) has offered the Vietnam Human Rights Act in Congress. The bill was passed by the House of Representatives in July 2004. But just as in the previous two sessions of Congress, it is being held up by senators who believe that free trade with no human rights conditions will someday bring about a free Vietnam.

Christians in Vietnam have pleaded for the United States to put pressure on the communist regime, sometimes at risk of their own lives. These brothers and sisters need the prayers and the intervention of Americans who care about religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam and wish to stop Vietnam's crackdown on Christians.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES WORKS TO INFLUENCE 2004 ELECTIONS

The National Council of Churches (NCC) initiated "voter education" efforts and worked to increase turnout among segments of the electorate for the 2004 election that traditionally vote overwhelmingly Democratic. The NCC assisted in the launching of two Internet-based activist projects, Faithful Democracy and Faithful America. The former, a joint effort of the NCC, denominational lobbies, two liberal Jewish political groups, and the Unitarian Universalist Association, along with a few other groups, is more narrowly focused on the 2004 elections. The latter "aspires to be an online wing of a powerful, new progressive faith movement" and is a joint effort of the far-left group True Majority (led by ice cream guru Ben Cohen of "Ben & Jerry's" fame) and the NCC.

Another large part of these efforts was the NCC's "Let Justice Roll" project that sought to highlight the problem of poverty, to "recommend and argue for specific policy alternatives," to make targeted increases in voter registration and turnout, and to challenge political candidates with a utopian call "to end poverty." The project sponsored rallies and press conference events in fifteen cities across the country.

The NCC has wroked with a number of secular liberal activist groups in these efforts, including USAction, ACORN, and People for the American Way. Rev. Dr. Bob Edgar, General Secretary of the NCC, is a former Democratic Congressman from the state of Washington.

CHURCH OFFICIALS ATTACK FEDERAL MARRIAGE AMENDMENT

Several liberal religious officials attacked a proposed constitutional amendment that would define marriage as the union of one man and one woman at a Capitol Hill press conference on June 3 (see page 10 for background). They charged that viewing marriage exclusively as a covenant between people of opposite sexes was a violation of religious freedom and civil rights.

Representatives of the Episcopal Church, the Alliance for Baptists, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Religious

Action Center for Reform Judaism, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State addressed the press conference. Signatories on the group's letter to members of Congress also included spokespeople for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, the American Jewish Committee, the Union for Reform Judaism and the (Roman Catholic) Loretto Women's Network. The Presbyterian, the Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory, was later ordered by the General Assembly of her denomination to stop lobbying against the FMA.

LIBERAL ACTIVISTS LAUNCH INITIATIVE FOR "PROGRESSIVE" RELIGIOUS LEADERS

On June 9, several hundred activists gathered in Washington, D.C., for a conference on "Faith and Progressive Policy: Proud Past, Promising Future." The Center for American Progress, a new left-wing think tank, sponsored the conference to begin a project with the same name.

While some speakers acknowledged that "people of faith" were not monolithic, the conference primarily portrayed most of "the religious community" as a demographic ripe for recruitment into left-wing political activism.

Conference speakers repeatedly denounced "the religious right" for seeking to influence public policy with its sectarian values while encouraging the religious liberals to be bolder in doing the same. Rev. Brenda Girton-Mitchell of the National Council of Churches assured attendees that God was on the side of "progressive" politics. NCC General Secretary Bob Edgar, urged liberal religious leaders to be much more vocal and active on behalf of controversial left-wing political causes, noting that the Old Testament prophets never took a poll before working to advance their "minority position."

CONTROVERSIAL UMC BISHOP RETIRES

After an eight-year term mired by controversy over his public repudiations of such doctrines as the virgin birth of Jesus, Christ's bodily resurrection, the authority of the Gospel of John, Christ's atonement for sin on the Cross,

and "Christo-centric exclusivism," C. Joseph Sprague has retired as a bishop of the United Methodist Church. The self-described "radical" regularly used his office to promote left-wing causes such as homosexuality (even to the point of baptizing his infant grandson at a "gay" themed worship service) and protesting the Iraq war.

The Northern Illinois Annual Conference held a banquet in honor of Sprague's career in August. He was praised for his "progressive theology" and liberal political activism. Sprague announced that despite his retirement, he planned to continue "to speak, write, and engage the demanding justice and peace issues which confront the church" and the world.

PRESBYTERIANS TO DIVEST SELECTIVELY FROM ISRAEL

In a controversial vote at the 2004 General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) decided to divest selectively from companies doing business in Israel. The plan would divest from any multinational companies whose business contributes to policies opposed by the PCUSA. A notable example is Caterpillar, which provides heavy equipment used by Israel for the demolition of the homes of Palestinian terrorists.

The vote drew quick criticism from Jewish leaders. "Holding something over the head of Israel to change its conduct, while holding nothing over the heads of the Palestinians to change their conduct... has caused utter dismay in the Jewish community," Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, told reporters.

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, criticized the resolution as "lopsided" and said that it blamed one side in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. "There is plenty of guilt and plenty of blame to go around," said Menitoff. "The expectation is that there will be a certain fairness in the critique."

Presbyterian and Jewish leaders met on September 28 to discuss that and other issues. But little progress seemed to be made.

Just one week prior to the meeting, the Anglican Peace with Justice Network issued a statement very critical of Israeli policy in the occupied territories, and declared that it would recommend a similar divestment policy to the Anglican churches.

GENE ROBINSON HONORED AT GALA FOR HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS GROUP

Episcopal Bishop V. Gene Robinson was presented with the Human Rights Campaign's National Equality Award during the activist group's eighth annual national dinner on Friday, October 8. The Human Rights Campaign describes itself as "America's largest gay and lesbian organization." Over 3,000 supporters attended the dinner in Washington, DC.

The evening's message was politically partisan. Speakers, including Elizabeth Edwards, the wife of Democratic Vice Presidential nominee John Edwards, described an ambitious public policy agenda for "gay" rights, blasted "President Bush and his extremist allies" for supporting the Federal Marriage Amendment, and stressed the urgency of voting to replace President Bush with Senator John Kerry.

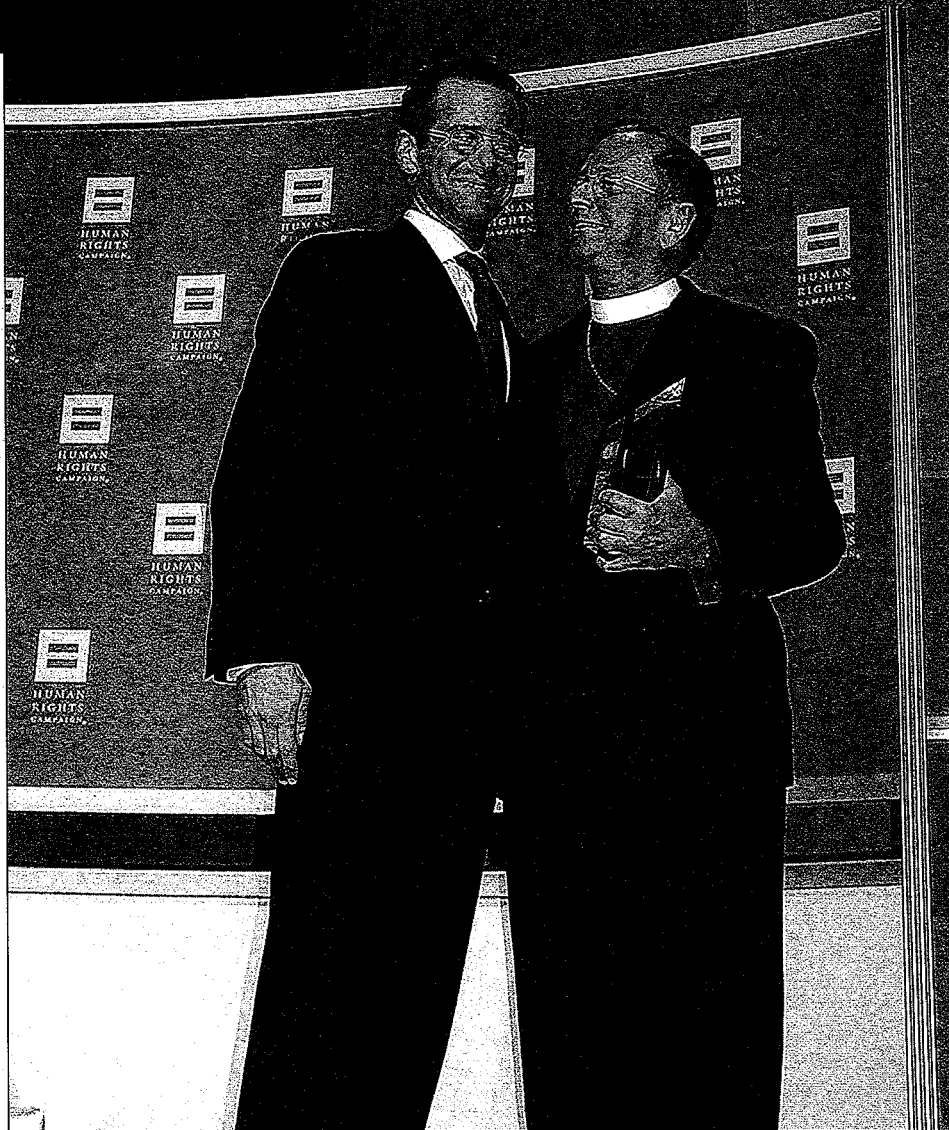
President and Executive Director Cheryl Jacques spoke at length to attack President Bush for his opposition to redefining marriage to include homosexual relationships. She praised recent gay "marriage" efforts in San Francisco and Massachusetts.

In his acceptance speech, Robinson lamented how "those of us who are religious have led in the oppression of gay and lesbian people, transgendered and bisexual people." He went on to berate "the religious right," which he said "doesn't speak for all of us," "doesn't love the way God loves," and has been allowed "to hijack the Bible and to hold it hostage from us." Robinson declared, "It's high time for us to take [the Bible] back," since "that book contains our stories of liberation." Robinson announced that "we will not rest until the church and all religious people repent of the violence that they have done to us and reclaim our spirituality and our God."

Robinson ended his speech by telling the audience, "I can't tell you how proud I am to be gay" and thanking the HRC for the honor.

IRD RELEASES REPORT CRITICAL OF MAINLINE CHURCH HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

At a September 27 press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., the Institute on Religion and Democracy released a study of human rights advocacy by the mainline Protestant churches, the National



Gene Robinson posing with Max Mutchnick, creator of the "gay"-themed "Will & Grace" television series, who introduced Robinson and presented him with an award.

Council of Churches and World Council of Churches. The report examines resolutions passed by the highest governing bodies of four denominations—the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Methodist Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—between 2000 and 2003. It also covers resolutions, press releases, and articles during that same period from the U.S. National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. The IRD report scrutinizes the churches' choice of the nations at which they aim their human rights criticisms. It uses as a yardstick the assessments of civil and political freedoms around the world compiled by the human rights group Freedom House.

The report found that over one-third of all human rights criticisms were aimed at the state of Israel. Only 19 percent of the church criticisms were aimed at nations

deemed "not free" in the 2004 Freedom House assessments. Many of the countries rated lowest by Freedom House—such as China, North Korea, and Saudi Arabia—were not criticized even once. Of the fifteen worst human rights abusers listed by Freedom House, only five received any criticism during the four years studied (2000-2003). While Israel was the prime target for criticism, the Palestinian Authority received no criticism.

"Israel is certainly responsible for some human rights abuses, as are all nations," said IRD President Diane Knippers. "But an extreme focus on Israel, while ignoring major human rights violators, seriously distorts the churches' message on universal human rights."

For more information, or to download a copy of the report, visit IRD's website: www.ird-renew.org. To order a hard copy of the report, call IRD at 202-969-8430.

In Memoriam: Dr. Carl F. H. Henry

by Ira Gallaway

In the early sixties, I was serving my third appointment at Walnut Hill Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas. I had been out of seminary a short time and was serving on the Conference Board of Social Concerns. As a part of a committee that was asked to pick leadership for a conference program on social action, I was concerned that all of the leadership was what I considered left-of-center. I voiced my concern strongly and was told to bring a recommendation to the next meeting.

To tell the truth, I did not know where to turn. At about 10:30 one morning, I decided to call the offices of *Christianity Today* and seek their help. As it turned out, it was 12:30 in Washington and Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, editor of *Christianity Today*, answered the phone as the rest of the staff was at lunch. Of course, I was surprised to be talking to the editor of the magazine, and explained my dilemma to Dr. Henry. Dr. Henry said, "You are a Methodist pastor and want to get a conservative speaker on social and economic issues?" I affirmed that was true and Dr. Henry, after learning the date, asked me, "Would you like for me to come and be the speaker?" I was surprised and more than agreeable. The committee approved the selection.



Dr. Henry came to Dallas, spoke eloquently and effectively at the meeting, and filled the pulpit in my church that weekend. For me, it was the beginning of a close friendship with a great man. The next year, I received an invitation to be a delegate at the first World Congress on Evangelism, one of a very few Methodists in attendance. This was one of many blessings in my life received through the courtesy and thoughtfulness of Carl Henry. Sally, my wife, toured with Helga Henry, Vonette Bright, and other wives of delegates while we were in Berlin.

Shortly after the Institute on Religion and Democracy was formed, there was a discussion about new board members. Along with Dr. Ed Robb and others, I enthusiastically recommended Dr. Henry for membership on the IRD board. He was a wise counselor and thoughtful board member over the years. He then served as an emeritus member until his death.

Carl Henry was a giant intellect, a world evangelical scholar, and a humble man who would come to the aid of a young Methodist pastor looking for evangelical help on social and economic matters. He

was the kind of man who made a difference, and he was a great blessing in my life.

Ira Gallaway is a member of the Board of Directors of IRD.



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