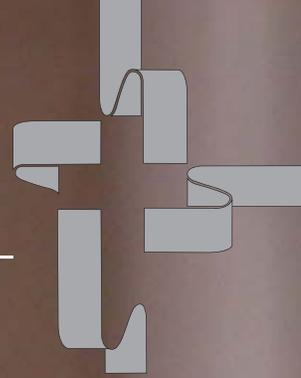


faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Spring 2016



Where Hijab-Wearing Wheaton Prof Went Wrong

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Page 7: Words cannot prevent the jihad against Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Mandaeans, and other Middle Eastern minorities. The U.S. government must match words with deeds on behalf of those who have been raped, tortured, enslaved, and murdered by ISIS and other jihadists. (Photo: IsraAID)

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Cover Photo: Wheaton College Professor Larycia Hawkins is joined by Mainline Protestant clergy as she discusses her administrative suspension from the Evangelical college on December 16, 2015, at Chicago Temple United Methodist Church. (Photo: Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune)

United Methodist Decline and WELCOME!

United Methodism in the U.S. lost over 114,000 members from 2013–2014, the 49th consecutive year of loss for the UMC and its predecessor bodies, whose last U.S. membership growth was in 1963–1964. So there are almost no active clergy now who have any memory of a growing denomination.

Over 50 years, United Methodism in the U.S. lost more than 4 million members, a number larger than the membership of nearly all U.S. denominations, and a numerical decline unprecedented in U.S. history, with little precedent in world history.

Only four of 56 conferences in the U.S. last year experienced membership growth, which is actually more than usual. Only a handful of U.S. bishops have ever led a growing conference.

Of course, fortunately, United Methodism is global, and overseas membership, almost all of it in Africa, is fast-growing. There are 7.2 million members in the U.S. and 5.2 million overseas. The latest overseas stats aren't yet available, but the African churches have been gaining over 200,000 annually, more than compensating for U.S. losses. United Methodism will soon have 13 million members globally, and the Africans, now at least 41 percent of total membership, will likely become the majority in 5 to 8 years.

But can dynamic African United Methodism save the sinking U.S. church? As the Africans gain proportional representation in church agency governing bodies, which currently they are denied, their leadership will begin to reshape the U.S. church in more evangelistic directions. But my guess is that the process will take 20 years or so before membership loss in the U.S. is reversed, entailing about another 2 million lost members, after what will by then have been a 70-year slide.

The U.S. church of its own has no institutional ability to reverse this decline. Over the last 20 years United Methodism has spent tens of millions of dollars on media campaigns like “Igniting Ministries” and “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.” They have had zero impact on membership decline.

Recently a friend told of visiting a United Methodist congregation in Washington, D.C., that is very big on proclaiming WELCOME–WELCOME–WELCOME! It's very inclusive and

very welcoming. The question is, WELCOME! to what? And for what? The answer is unclear.

United Methodist official focus on “open doors” and WELCOME! has implied that the denomination has no core beliefs or purpose beyond self-celebration. The results are predictable as the church loses 100,000 members annually.

It should be noted that there are thousands of United Methodist congregations and thousands of clergy devoted not just to WELCOME! but to redemption and transformation through the Gospel. Hundreds of Gospel-minded new clergy are entering United Methodism. And in many ways, there is more serious study and appreciation of Wesleyan doctrine today in the denomination than at any time in a century. Most of it is happening with little official sanction and even in spite of it.

United Methodism is both dying and rejuvenating. But so then, too, is the world as a whole. The constant challenge is to focus not on the dying but on the areas of new life and vitality that the Lord is always generating as he redeems his world. ✚

Over the last 20 years United Methodism has spent tens of millions of dollars on media campaigns like ‘Igniting Ministries’ and ‘Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.’ They have had zero impact on membership decline.

Mark Tooley



Mark D. Tooley is the President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

United Methodists, Israel, and Divestment

Groups advocating anti-Israel divestment are urging divestment from five Israeli banks and a construction firm by the United Methodist Board of Pensions.

United Methodism's General Conference in 2008 and 2012 overwhelmingly rejected anti-Israel divestment, which the pensions board itself also quietly opposed.

Now the pension board says it's not targeting Israel as the five Israeli banks are among 39 companies from 14 countries from which it is divesting based on human rights concerns. It cites Freedom House, a longtime monitor of global political freedom, as a key source.

The 14 countries include North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Israel is the

only democracy on the list. According to Freedom House, on a freedom scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being free and 7 "worst of the worst,"

Israel is assigned a score of 1.5. All of the other countries on the pension board list have a score of 7, except Morocco with 4.5 and South Sudan with 6.5. The Palestinian Authority-Administered Territories have a 6.

The pension board faults the banks and construction firm for facilitating Jewish settlements on the West Bank. It



A Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) protest in Melbourne, Australia against Israel in 2010. (Photo: Takver / Wikimedia Commons)

remains invested with 18 other Israeli firms.

A similar move was made 2014, when the pension board sold shares in a British security firm that sold equipment to Israel. Pro-divestment groups claimed a victory, while the pension board was silent. ✚

Episcopal Officials Suspended by Presiding Bishop

Three top officials with the Episcopal Church have been suspended by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry less than two months after he assumed office.

Chief Operating Officer Bishop Stacy Sauls, Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Director of Mission Samuel McDonald, and Director of Public Engagement Alex Baumgarten were placed on administrative suspension December 9.

"This is a result of concerns that have been raised about possible misconduct in carrying out their duties as members of senior management of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society [DFMS]," Curry explained in a letter to Episcopal Church staff that was made available on December 11. The DFMS is the organizational name for the national Episcopal Church.

The letter does not disclose the allegations against the three senior officials, but explains that an independent investigator will examine the concerns. No information was given about who made the allegations. Curry reported that a law firm has been selected to conduct the investigation.

"To protect the integrity of that process, we will not be able to say more about the concerns at this time," Curry states. The Presiding Bishop took office November 1 following his election at last summer's Episcopal General Convention.

Curry asked church staff to "refrain from speculation" in order to "ensure the integrity of a fair and just process."

There has been no indication that law enforcement is part of the investigation, nor that the church's disciplinary canons

have been invoked, suggesting that the matter is limited to administrative matters, not criminal or canonical violations.

While the staff letter offered no further information, there have been recent tensions between church staff and Episcopal Church Executive Council, an elected body that convenes in the three-year period between General Conventions.

On November 18, a concealed audio recording device was found during a meeting of the Executive Council in Linthicum Heights, Maryland. The device was placed near the table where Curry and Episcopal House of Deputies President Gay Clark Jennings had been seated during plenary sessions. At several points in the meeting, the council went into executive session and staff and visitors were asked to leave the room. ✚

Anglican Communion Leaders Suspend Episcopal Church

Top bishops in the Anglican Communion voted in January to suspend the U.S.-based Episcopal Church from full participation in the worldwide family of churches historically descended from the Church of England. The suspension follows votes at the Episcopal Church's governing General Convention this past summer to enact a gender-neutral marriage rite, unilaterally changing a core doctrine of the church. The suspension will last for three years, enough time for the Episcopal Church to address the matter at the denomination's next General Convention in 2018.

The gathering of leaders (known as "primates") from 38 Anglican Communion provinces, including Anglican Church in North America Archbishop Foley Beach, was convened by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby to discuss pressing issues facing the third largest family of Christian churches.

"It is our unanimous desire to walk together," the statement reads, acknowledging at the same time that "the seriousness of these matters" requires that the Episcopal Church "no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee

and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity."

The worldwide Anglican Communion has been riven by discord since the U.S.-based Episcopal Church consecrated an openly partnered homosexual man as bishop of the diocese of New Hampshire in 2003. The consecration brought to the forefront long-simmering disagreements about scriptural authority and resulted in impaired communion between the Episcopal Church and more traditionalist provinces located primarily in the Global South. ✚



Primates (senior bishops) from across the Anglican Communion gathered at Canterbury Cathedral for an evensong service following an afternoon of meetings January 11, 2016 (Photo: Canterbury Cathedral)

Pope, Russian Church Leader Hold Historic Meeting in Cuba

For the first time, the top leaders of the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Church have met, issuing an appeal for the protection of Christians under assault in the Middle East and defending traditional teachings on marriage and family.



Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill sign a joint statement during their historic February 12 meeting in Cuba. (Photo: World Council of Churches)

Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill met February 12 in Cuba, nearly 1,000 years after the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity separated. Mutual suspicion between Rome and Moscow, as well as the complications of the Cold War, had prevented any meeting between the Russian church leader and the Roman pontiff, the Reuters news service reported.

“In many countries of the Middle East and North Africa whole families, villages and cities of our brothers and sisters in Christ are being completely exterminated,” the two said in a joint declaration in apparent reference to violence by militant groups such as Islamic State. “Their churches are being barbarously ravaged and looted, their sacred objects profaned, their monuments destroyed.”

The two religious leaders also expressed concern about the state

of the family, which they described in the statement as “the natural centre of human life and society.”

“The family is based on marriage, an act of freely given and faithful love between a man and a woman,” Francis and Kirill wrote. “It is love that seals their union and teaches them to accept one another as a gift. Marriage is a school of love and faithfulness. We regret that other forms of cohabitation have been placed on the same level as this union, while the concept, consecrated in the biblical tradition, of paternity and maternity as the distinct vocation of man and woman in marriage is being banished from the public conscience.”

Francis and Kirill also issued a call “to respect the inalienable right to life” while lamenting that “millions are denied the very right to be born into the world” and that “the blood of the unborn cries out to God.”

The two met only a week after the encounter was announced, according to Reuters.

“Finally,” Francis said as he and Kirill entered through doors on opposite sides of a room at Havana airport, “We are brothers.” ✚

Europeans Recognize ISIS-Caused Middle East Genocide

The European Parliament in February unanimously passed a resolution recognizing the Islamic State’s (ISIS or Da’ish) “systematic mass-murder” of Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities as genocide. The resolution, the first by that body to recognize an ongoing conflict as genocide, followed an earlier resolution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that also passed with overwhelming support. The British Parliament’s House of Lords has also taken up the issue.

The United States government remains absent from those world powers speaking out against ISIS’s genocidal slaughter and destruction in the Middle East.

Reports have leaked for months that the U.S. State Department is preparing to issue a genocide determination against ISIS, but it might only include the Yazidis,

and not Christians or other beleaguered religious minorities.

The issue has been made more complicated and time-sensitive by an Omnibus spending bill signed into law by President Obama in December. The bill contained a provision requiring Secretary of State John Kerry to provide Congress with an evaluation of “the persecution of, including attacks against, Christians and people of other religions in the Middle East” and determine whether such attacks constitute genocide. That report is required within 90 days from the bill’s passage.

The Council of Europe’s resolution, “Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria,” passed in January states that “the terrorist entity... Da’ish” has “perpetrated acts of genocide and other serious crimes punishable under international law.” It adds, “States should act on the presumption

that Da’ish commits genocide and should be aware that this entails action under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.”

The European Parliament’s resolution went a step further by naming ISIS’s victims of genocide. It identifies “Christian (Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian, Melkite and Armenian), Yazidi, Turkmens, Shabak, Kaka’i, Sabaeen-Mandean, Kurdish, and Shi’a communities, as well as many Arabs and Sunni Muslims.”

The United Kingdom Parliamentary debate in February revealed that 75 members of the House of Lords had identified the plight of Yazidis, Christians, and other religious minorities as genocide, and had written to the Prime Minister just before Christmas “urging her Majesty’s Government to declare events in Syria and Iraq as a genocide.” ✚

Words Are Not Enough: *America Must Intervene on Behalf of Mideast Christians*

By Faith J.H. McDonnell



Syrian Christian refugee family (Photo: IsraAID)

It's refreshing when statements issued by the President of the United States correspond to reality—as in President Obama's 2015 Christmas statement, when he acknowledged that Christians and other religious minorities are persecuted because of their faith.

But words cannot prevent the jihad against Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Mandaeans, and other Middle Eastern minorities. The U.S. government must match words with deeds on behalf of those who have been raped, tortured, enslaved, and murdered by ISIS and other jihadists.

On December 23, the White House released President Obama's statement on "Persecuted Christians at Christmas." After certain other statements by Obama, the acknowledgment was a pleasant surprise to many global religious liberty advocates and others who track such issues. Recall that in February 2015, a White House statement on the 21 Coptic Christians beheaded by ISIS in Libya referred to "Egyptian citizens." Only later was it acknowledged that they were Christians. In April 2015, the President lamented the slaughter of 148 college students in Garissa, Kenya, by al Shabaab, not mentioning they had been singled out

for death specifically because they were Christians.

In his Christmas statement, the President gave thanks for being "fortunate enough to live" in a country that honors "the birthright of all people to practice their faith freely." He said that he and Michelle were "ever-mindful" that many of their fellow Christians "do not enjoy that right," and their hearts and minds were with "those who have been driven from their ancient homelands by unspeakable violence and persecution." Obama deplored the "brutal atrocities committed against these communities by ISIL," and urged prayer on their behalf.

Unarguably, these are good, powerful words. But it takes actions and policies in addition to words, no matter how moving, to protect targeted ISIS victims of murder, rape, torture, and enslavement. Currently there is a disconnect between the President's words and his failure to take the kind of action on behalf of ISIS-targeted victims that every other administration of the past 40 years would have easily taken long before now.

The Christians, Yazidis, and other most at-risk, targeted communities have been disregarded by the State Department's Bureau of Population,

Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the "voluntary" agencies' (VOLAGs) with whom it contracts to resettle immigrants in the United States. The VOLAGs – Church World Service, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and World Relief – have made little effort to go beyond the UN refugee camps to reach the most vulnerable victims of ISIS. Members of religious minorities avoid the refugee camps because ISIS killers, pretending to be refugees, penetrate the camps to murder the "infidels." So the communities whose constituents best fit the definition of a "refugee" are largely excluded from UN assistance and rely on the goodness of Christian humanitarian relief groups and other NGOs. They are also largely excluded from the opportunity for resettlement in the United States.

There is also a disconnect between the President's words and the actions of an Administration that has sought to

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InterVarsity Seduced by Compartmentalized 'Justice'

by Derryck Green

*Michelle Higgins speaking at Urbana 15.
(Photo: InterVarsity / Vimeo Screenshot)*

INTERVARSITY

Despite the incongruity between its activist agenda and what the name of the organization (and hashtag) superficially implies, the social current of #BlackLivesMatter has successfully swallowed a number of churches and Christian organizations in its supposed quest for racial and social “justice.” InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is the latest victim to be seduced by the cultural fad of “justice”—always compartmentalized—at the expense of biblical justice, which is supposed to permeate the totality of the Christian’s life.

During InterVarsity’s Urbana missions conference, Michelle Higgins, director of Faith for Justice, a Christian advocacy group—and herself a member of #BlackLivesMatter—lectured listening Christians about the need to be involved in the fight against racial injustice. Fighting against racial injustice, in addition to all forms of injustice, is a Christian obligation that’s firmly rooted in the mission of the church. The body of Christ is—and should be—the vessel of racial reconciliation, predicated on Christ’s having overcome all superficial forms of division

and separation, including those based on racial and ethnic considerations.

But for Higgins, or any Christian, to conflate the fight against racial injustice with supporting the agenda, intent, and behavior of #BlackLivesMatter is “chasing after the wind”—a fool’s errand that leads many sincere Christians astray. Christian leaders have a tremendous responsibility to be voices and examples of reason. Christian credibility is at stake. So it’s a cause for concern when Christians engage in negligent and questionable behavior. Here it involves using racial guilt to manipulate Christians into supporting a movement that perpetuates a secular social and political narrative that consists of lies and racial paranoia under the guise of fighting racial inequality.

During her speech, Higgins sought to religiously justify support of #BlackLivesMatter in a manner similar to the Christians and theologians that used Christianity to justify the black power movement of the past. Higgins said, “Black Lives Matter is not a mission of hate. It is not a mission to bring about incredible anti-Christian values and reforms to the

world. Black Lives Matter is a movement on mission in the truth of God.”

That a Christian felt comfortable enough to say this with a straight face is disturbing. The fact that the audience was so embracing of her message, especially in light of the rhetoric and strategies used by #BlackLivesMatter activists, is even more disturbing, reflecting poorly on Christians. The claim that #BlackLivesMatter is on “mission in the truth of God” is about as true as the claim made at Michael Brown’s funeral—that he was “out spreading the word of Jesus Christ” before he was killed.

Brown was actually stealing a box of cigarillos from a liquor store shortly before he was killed.

Higgins continued, noting the presence of racism in various areas of life where she claimed the church is silent, including the racial disparities in education and the criminal justice system—obligatorily mentioning the cases of Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner and Michael Brown. She then clarified what she wants people to think #BlackLivesMatter means, saying,

“Now, I don’t want all people of color to go scot-free for wrongdoing—I don’t want to see people of color never arrested for anything. Black lives matter doesn’t mean all black folk can kill people and steal stuff....that’s not what we want, that’s not what I want. What do we want? Justice. And what is justice? Justice means my baby boy, my baby girl will not be tried, condemned...executed on the street. That’s justice. Justice means the burden of supremacy...is not up on you, because God is pleased with you. Therefore, you can be pleased with everyone he has made.”

Higgins added,

“BlackLivesMatter demands that we face facts and tell the truth...it demands that I know myself and that I see you, it demands that [we see] those that have been in prison...and executed...because of their skin color, and that we free them. It demands that white and black and brown and Asian and Hispanic brothers and sisters be treated as one. Redefine justice the way that God defines justice; your God is not white, he’s not Japanese or Congolese—your God is God.”

Ok, let’s face facts and tell the truth.

Here’s a fact. There are racial disparities in education and the criminal justice system. And there is a case to be made, at least in education, that the disparities are partially the result of substandard education intentionally delivered to poor black and Hispanic children. Deliberately giving poor children less access to quality education is a partial predictor of future dependency, contributing to a growing underclass. Chicago, Detroit, and New York are perfect examples. This cause should be taken up by Christians, but #BlackLivesMatter has nothing to do with it.

Further, if the goal is to reduce the racial disparities in education, people should not only advocate that poor children receive better quality education, they should also encourage the redemption and reconciliation of the black family. Not only would that contribute to the mitigation of academic disparities suffered by blacks, increasing the number of intact black families would also mitigate the racial disparities in the criminal

justice system. Blacks aren’t locked up disproportionately simply and only because they’re black. Blacks are imprisoned disproportionately because of the disintegration of the family and the collapse of the Christian moral value system.

Speaking of criminals, here’s another fact: #BlackLivesMatter valorizes black criminality and sanctifies black criminals. The lives of everyday blacks don’t matter to this movement, including the lives of blacks tormented by black criminals. This is why #BlackLivesMatter is a misnomer. The only black lives that matter to these social agitators are the ones killed by (white) cops, largely the result of the actions of the criminals themselves. Defending and honoring the lives of black criminals over the lives of blacks that aren’t criminals, but in need of our attention, is despicable and unworthy of being called or legitimized by Christianity.

Moreover, with the exception of Tamir Rice—who was shot and killed because he was playing with a toy gun that police officers mistook for real—Michael Brown and Eric Garner were killed because they attacked police officers or resisted arrest when their criminal behavior was confronted. (Sandra Bland also refused to listen to an officer’s command, which resulted in a physical confrontation.) This isn’t to say that they deserved to die, but they also weren’t “innocent” nor were the merely “victims” because of their race. There are consequences when one confronts police officers, is insubordinate to police officers, or resists arrest. For Higgins to conflate their deaths with the possibility of her “baby boy” and her “baby girl” being “tried, condemned... and executed on the street”—presumably because they’re black and nothing else—trivializes any real understanding of what justice entails.

Further, where specifically has anyone, in modern America, been “executed” in prison only because of his or her skin color? That’s a heavy charge that deserves to be supported by very firm evidence, particularly when said by someone who self-identifies with the name of Christ. Without supporting evidence, it’s a lie. Additionally, why exactly should we “free” anyone in prison, as a rule, merely because of his or her skin color?

Now the obvious but compulsory disclaimer: fighting against racial injustice

and inequality is the Christian thing to do; there aren’t many Christians who would argue against doing so. Christianity’s influence was responsible for ending slavery and was the moral motivator and sustainer of the civil rights movement—the last great moral movement in our nation’s history. Supporting #BlackLivesMatter isn’t the proper or most effective and practical way for Christians to meet the challenge of fighting the vestiges of racial injustice. In many ways, supporting #BlackLivesMatter contributes to racial discord and perpetuates racial acrimony.

Additionally, part of fighting racial injustice is to resist the reflexive urge to label every socioeconomic disparity a result of racial injustice—a characteristic of #BlackLivesMatter. Purposefully mislabeling every racial disparity between blacks and their racial counterparts as the result of “racism” trivializes actual occurrences of racism, preventing these occurrences from being appropriately addressed. It also stifles constructive strategies (which have nothing to do with race) that can be implemented to diminish socioeconomic gaps that continue to exist.

Trying to address racial discrimination is one thing. Trying to do so facilitated by the dishonest rhetoric and antagonistic behavior of the #BlackLivesMatter organization should be of no interest to Christians. Christians shouldn’t allow themselves to be influenced by the kind of overt deception that #BlackLivesMatter espouses, and they shouldn’t legitimize the tactics and secular agenda of such a duplicitous movement.

Sadly, InterVarsity undermined its religious credibility by granting unearned moral authority to #BlackLivesMatter. Shame on Michelle Higgins for conflating the fight against racial injustice—a worthy cause—with the questionable and unworthy cause of #BlackLivesMatter. And shame on InterVarsity for legitimizing this error by giving Higgins such a big platform to mislead so many Christians. ❄️



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Here's Where Hijab-Wearing Wheaton Professor Went Wrong

by Megan Pavlischek Grant

Wheaton College Professor Larycia Hawkins donned an Islamic head covering as a symbol of solidarity with Muslims during the season of Advent. Hawkins triggered controversy after claiming that Muslims and Christians "worship the same God". (Photo: Larycia Hawkins / Facebook)

As an evangelical Christian and Wheaton College alumna (2009), who has spent years living among Muslims in Morocco and has worked with Iraqi refugees in Illinois, I find that the controversy surrounding Larycia Hawkins appeals to some of my deepest theological, intellectual, and emotional commitments.

The issue boils down to two of Hawkins' actions:

(1) She committed to wear a head scarf for the season of Advent as an expression of compassion and solidarity with Muslims in America. Good for her!

(2) She justified her actions on Facebook, saying, "I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book..." Here is where she went terribly wrong.

One of my passions is encouraging evangelical expressions of empathy, compassion, and solidarity with Muslims. In

of life. Later I went back to Morocco as a Fulbright scholar and took a more intentional approach to understanding the religion and culture of my host country.

During my years in Morocco, a Muslim family took me in and made me their own. They called me daughter, sister, and auntie. They stuck their necks out for me, defended me to neighbors who didn't approve of the Christian they had taken in, and generously took me into their home for months at a time. While I lived in Morocco it was the Muslims that I knew (certainly not the evangelical Christians) who showed me the most incredible, humbling grace and kindness.

As an expression of solidarity with my Muslim "family," I fasted alongside them during Ramadan several years. I was able to share their hunger and thirst, and commiserate with them about the almost unbearable sense of grumpiness before we finally broke the fast and once

again could unite in joy and laughter. My gesture of solidarity meant a lot to them for reasons I don't quite understand. I suppose they felt respected and validated. It also taught me a lot.

However, despite my commitment to show compassion and solidarity with some of my closest friends, I would *never* say, as Dr. Hawkins did, that my empathy is because of some sense of theological similarity. Doing so would both defile my own theological integrity and cheapen the sincere and profound love I feel for them *despite* the incompatibility of our theologies. Furthermore, it would put improper limits on my call to Christian compassion and kindness.

First, to say that Muslims are "like me" because we are all "people of the book" is just false. While it may be the easy "get out of awkward conversation free" card, it defies my theological convictions as an evangelical Christian. I believe in a Trinitarian God, and I cannot deny the deity of Christ, or that he was begotten of the Father. These beliefs, though, are blasphemy to my Muslim friends and family. I can choose to downplay these differences, or I can express them with gentleness and respect. When I affirm my Trinitarian God, my dear Muslim friends see clearly that my God is not the same as theirs. At least one of us is in ignorance. We can't both be right. By acknowledging this, we can begin a *real* conversation about what we believe. We speak with sincerity and respect. This is how *true*, *deep*, *loving* inter-religious relationships

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function: with mutual understanding *without* capitulation. Unless, of course, through brilliant reasoning one succeeds in convincing the other.

Secondly, Hawkins' justification of her compassionate solidarity on the grounds of theological compatibility is completely unnecessary. Christians are called to show compassion to the Muslim—not because of our shared *theology*, but because of our shared *humanity*. Because Muslims, as well as Christians, bear the image of God, we must treat them with dignity. Hawkins' statement that she stands with Muslims because they are "like me" in their religion is insufficient. I would ask Dr. Hawkins if

the same compassion would be incumbent upon us toward people who are not of the Abrahamic tradition. Of course it is. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." That includes the Muslim, the polytheist, and the atheist. "Love your neighbor as yourself." Who is my neighbor? Humanity.

Wheaton's statement cites the following as reasons for Hawkins' suspension:

"Wheaton College faculty and staff make a commitment to accept and model our institution's faith foundations with **integrity, compassion and theological clarity.**"

Hawkins' unspoken message in donning the head scarf expresses solidarity

with Muslims in America at a time when they need such compassionate encouragement and neighborliness. I applaud Hawkins for this. The statements she made to explain and justify this expression, however, are deeply problematic and do raise questions regarding her theological clarity, if not her theological integrity. ✚



Megan Grant is a Wheaton grad (2009), was a Fulbright research scholar in Morocco, and now teaches at a Christian high school in the Annapolis area.

Words Are Not Enough

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differentiate its treatment of Christians and Yazidis. Widely reported news that the State Department will soon issue a genocide determination for ISIS' victims also reports that State intends to issue the genocide determination only for Yazidis, despite the fact that, as found by unanimous vote of the U.S. Commission on International Freedom, Christians and the other religious minorities "have been similarly targeted for annihilation."

It is time that the Obama Administration prioritized the protection of *actual victims* of religious persecution. The current path of migrant resettlement upon which both the United States and Western Europe have trod does not give priority to the most vulnerable communities. The State Department should, first and foremost, be offering visas to those Christians and other religious minorities who choose to leave their homeland. If President Obama is still afraid that this would appear to be a "religious test" in which Christians get the prize, he need not fear. Apart from the reality that Christians never get the prize in this kind of contest-from-hell, priority would be given to groups that have been "targeted for annihilation," of which Christians just happen to be one of the foremost examples.

The Administration must also issue a genocide determination that includes Christians along with Yazidis. A genocide determination would legally require that forceful action be taken to protect the vulnerable,

The current path of migrant resettlement... does not give priority to the most vulnerable communities

persecuted communities and enable them to return to their homes. This is particularly important because many advocates believe that it is a far better option immediately to provide protection and empowerment to ISIS-targeted Christian and Yazidi communities in Syria and Iraq for those who want to stay in their homeland. Many see this as the only way to prevent these ancient cultures that predate biblical days from disappearing. It also seems a wiser option than abandoning much of the Middle East to Islamic Caliphate-builders.

The Administration so far has failed to recognize and acknowledge the genocidal campaign undertaken by ISIS against Christians and Yazidis, and

therefore has not offered the required support that follows such a determination. If the State Department continues to fail to take action, U.S. policy towards ISIS-targeted Middle Eastern victims of annihilation will indicate not only to desperate Assyrian Christians and other religious minorities and their persecutors, but to other Islamist supremacists, the lack of seriousness with which the Obama Administration takes the existential threat to Christianity and religious freedom in the Middle East. It will also indicate the lack of seriousness with which the Obama Administration continues to take the threat of global jihad.

If the Obama Administration only offers Christmas statements about persecuted Christians with no sign of any real action or change taking place, President Obama's words will not only be insufficient, they will be an insult to the Christians and other victims of genocide by ISIS. ✚

(This article originally appeared on Breitbart and is reprinted with permission)



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Dying Churches, Vibrant Churches

by Mark Tooley

A young crowd from Redeemer Church of Arlington gathers for a retreat photo in 2015. The congregation, which was planted in 2010, meets in an old United Methodist church building and has thrived along with other evangelical congregations near Arlington, Virginia's Columbia Pike corridor. (Photo: Redeemer Arlington)

A sad, revealing story in *The Washington Post* about a century-old Presbyterian church near where I grew up told how the church is selling its property. Under the current pastor the church has lost half its membership, and online statistics reveal average attendance is fewer than 30. I've passed the handsome stone sanctuary hundreds of times over the decades, and it probably seats several hundred inside.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation is selling its property for \$8.5 million (under value) to a non-profit entity that will, with county funding, develop the lot into a high rise apartment building offering 173 affordable housing units. Possibly the small congregation will rent worship space in that new structure when completed in a few years, if the congregation survives.

Arlington County, just across the Potomac from Washington, D.C., is fast-growing and expensive. These affordable housing units are much needed. But how sad it is that this dwindling congregation is abandoning its prominent location because it could not as a Christian church appeal to the surrounding community.

This congregation's website offers a timeline about its one-hundred-year history. Among the few items it briefly lists are its 1990s dissent from its denomination's then official policy affirming celibacy in singleness and monogamy in male-female marriage. Of course, since then, the PCUSA has abandoned this policy, which led to schism and accelerated nationwide membership loss.

Arlington is a very liberal and diverse community, so you might think a liberal congregation would have broad appeal. But evidently not. Reflecting national trends, few of the Mainline congregations in Arlington are staying above water.

This decline I witnessed myself starting in the 1970s. As a small boy early in that decade my United Methodist Sunday school class had perhaps a dozen or more my age. By the end of the decade, as a teenager, there was virtually nobody my age, which no doubt was true for other nearby Mainline congregations. In the late 1980s when in my 20s I was part of an Arlington-wide United Methodist group aiming to generate ministry for twenty somethings. At that point, there were no local congregations in our denomination successfully reaching that demographic. The only examples of nearby successful young adult ministry then known to me were both conservative Presbyterian congregations.

Forty years ago, when I was a boy, Arlington was losing population and closing schools. The WWII generation that first suburbanized Arlington had finished their child-rearing. Young families were drawn to the outer suburbs. In recent years Arlington has again boomed in population, is building schools, and has become fashionable. Millennials have flocked to Arlington, but so too have young families, and many immigrants. The old Mainline churches, some of them dating to the rural past, that built big buildings after WWII during suburbanization, are mostly empty. Some have closed.

Not far from this soon-to-be-demolished stone Presbyterian church is a large formerly United Methodist sanctuary that once was the virtual cathedral church of United Methodism in Arlington. It's now occupied by an apparently thriving new Calvinist congregation that cites the Westminster Confession, along with venerable ecumenical church creeds, on its website. The above photo from its website shows their church retreat, about two hours away last summer. Presumably much of the congregation was not

there, but it still looks like a robust and young crowd. Also nearby in that Arlington neighborhood is a thriving Southern Baptist church plant with a young pastor. Still another seemingly strong evangelical congregation meets a few blocks away in rented school space.

Apparently the Presbyterian congregation could not appeal to any of the hundreds of people attending new church plants in its neighborhood. Confirming this trend, I learned on Christmas Eve while attending the United Methodist church where I grew up that it also plans to demolish its 100-year-old structure in favor of affordable housing. Its average worship is larger, perhaps 70-90 people, so its chances of survival as a congregation seem much better, and I hope the transition works. The building, on a very valuable lot across from a subway station, needs lots of repair, which no doubt is beyond their reach. My grandmother originally picked the church because of its beautiful stained glass.

Meanwhile, not far up the street, a new Anglican congregation has built a beautiful new sanctuary. My acquaintance with many young Arlington Christians, reveals many vibrant new evangelical churches with young congregations in Arlington, most of them in rented space, beyond what I could have imagined just a few years ago.

There is no doubt a cycle to how the Lord raises up new congregations even as others complete their season. I'm grateful for the spiritual riches I gained at the Methodist church of my boyhood. In future years there will be many thousands who reflect back on the similar spiritual riches they gained at what are now new church plants in dynamic, fast-evolving Arlington. ✚



Mark D. Tooley is the President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy.



Anglicans Mobilize for Life

by Jeff Walton

For the first time, Anglican Christians presented a pro-life conference timed to coincide with the national March for Life held every January that mobilizes U.S. and Canadian churches to address sanctity-of-life issues.

Warning of a “tsunami” of state legislation and court rulings legalizing physician-assisted suicide “just over the horizon,” conference speakers sought to equip local churches to address problems like abortion or euthanasia that are in, or coming to, their communities. Unlike the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion nationwide in 1973, the Church is more aware of the perils of euthanasia and is better positioned to push back against laws allowing people to take their own lives, speakers argued.

“People care about abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide, but many do not know what to do about them or where to get started,” explained organizers Bishop John Guernsey of the Anglican Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic and Deacon Georgette Forney of Anglicans for Life.

Guernsey and Forney have organized groups of Anglicans and Episcopalians to participate in the annual March for Life for several years, but the conference, “Summit 2016: Mobilizing the Church for Life,” broke new ground for Anglicans on January 21 with over a dozen teachings

Anglican Church in North America Bishops (L-R) David Hicks, John Miller, Julian Dobbs, Foley Beach, Deacon Georgette Forney, Bishops John Guernsey and Clark Lowenfeld gather at “Summit 2016: Mobilizing the Church for Life” on January 22, 2016. (Photo: Ali Kirby / Anglicans for Life)

aimed at equipping local congregations. Registrants from more than 15 dioceses participated in the suburban Washington, D.C., event.

Guernsey and Forney cited the biblical mandate found in Isaiah 1:17 as central to the event: “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (NIV).

Beginning of Life

Conference speakers were encouraged by the direction of the Pro-Life movement and the increasing traction that they were witnessing in the public square.

“I don’t think there is a better example of Christian cultural engagement,” declared Summit speaker John Stonestreet of the Colson Center. Stonestreet pointed to statistics showing the Pro-Life movement getting younger and younger and to the development of ministries to assist post-abortive women. “The idea that no one will care for these children, or that Pro-Life people only care about life before birth, has been proven wrong.”

Stonestreet proposed that Christians do not operate issue-by-issue but present the Gospel story of life, “which is better than the secular story chapter-by-chapter.” Human equality, he argued, is based on something inside rather than exterior things—an understanding that is rooted in Christian teaching.

Ministries to women who have experienced miscarriage and abortion were also highlighted.

“I’m a miracle—that the Lord could take the person I was and make me the person I am,” shared Rev. Peggy Means about God’s “transforming grace” working in her life to heal her following an abortion she sought as a young woman. Means, clergy at St. James Anglican Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, framed abortion aftercare not as a cultural or political issue, but more as a spiritual one.

“You’re a sinner with that big scarlet letter on your chest, and it doesn’t matter; we’re going to love you anyway,” Means said of her work with Rachel’s Vineyard and the Silent No More Awareness Campaign.

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Downton Abbey Eliminates God from the Show

by Joseph Rossell

British audiences are so hostile to Christianity that television producers reportedly purged references to God and religion from the hit TV show *Downton Abbey*. Erasing Christianity from the historic drama reveals just how far Britain has strayed from its religious heritage.

Implicitly denying the formative role of Christianity in English society and government—a trend mirrored in America—bodes ill for the nation’s future. Indeed, stripping any society or government of its grounding in religious truth is a thing to be feared.

The wildly popular BBC series *Downton Abbey* kicked off its sixth and final season here in the United States in January. Millions of American fans tuned in, but many may have missed the show’s subtle censorship of religion.

The Daily Mail (UK) reported in November “that television executives were worried that any mention of religion might alienate the largely atheist viewing public and so banned any mention of God.” These revelations came following comments by *Downton Abbey* historical advisor Alastair Bruce who told *The Telegraph* (UK) on November 15 that the

show’s executives ordered producers to “leave religion out of it.”

“I can remember discussions that almost seem comical now,” Bruce recalled.

Bruce described how producers went to extreme lengths to squelch all religious references. This required intentional effort, since religious expression pervaded English culture in 1910s and 1920s.

Perhaps most absurdly, “Abbey” was almost axed from the show’s title because of its monastic connection. But that wasn’t all. The producers also avoided portraying the Crowley family—the central characters of *Downton Abbey*—in the process of sitting down to meals.

“In essence you hardly ever see a table that isn’t already sat at. We never see the beginning of a luncheon or a dinner, because no one was ever allowed to see a grace being said,” Bruce told *The Telegraph*.

The dictate from executives even influenced minutia as small as how napkins were fold. Bruce said producers kept him from folding napkins in the shape of a bishop’s miter as tradition dictated. He instead had to employ a simple triangle fold.

Bruce decried the extreme sensitivity to religion in the British TV industry.

“Everyone panics when you try to do anything religious on the telly,” he said.

However, it isn’t just British TV that has trouble with portraying religion. Hollywood has its problems, too. When Hollywood does portray religion, it often aggressively casts it in a negative light.

IRD President Mark Tooley wrote in the IRD’s *Juicy Ecumenism* blog about Hollywood’s bias against God after watching *Night Train to Lisbon* with Jeremy Irons. “Why is Hollywood so determined to portray Christianity as a foe of political freedom when actually it is the originator and guarantor of it?” Tooley asked.

Sadly, with the rise of militant secularism in America, overt attacks against Christianity in popular culture have increased. So too have subtle efforts to whitewash Christianity from our history. ✚



Joseph Rossell serves as Research Analyst at IRD.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Can Google Silence the Church?

by Chelsen Vicari

Whether we’re talking about the redefinition of marriage or taxpayer-funded abortion and contraception, one question is crossing many Christians’ minds: Where will the next challenge to religious liberty arise? Some are concerned that the next threat to religious liberty will be a cyber showdown.

That possibility was addressed by Joe Carter, communications specialist for

the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) and editor for the Gospel Coalition blog, during his lecture at the Family Research Center (FRC) on December 10. After an inspiring presentation on various strategies necessary to defend religious liberty, alarm over online threats to freedom arose during the Q&A session that followed.

“Where do you see our biggest potential threat to religious liberty on the internet side of things as far as corporately owned websites—not just websites—but platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google?” asked one member of the FRC audience. “And will anybody even hear about it if our freedoms in that area are removed?”

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Google

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The audience member's question alluded to recent comments made by Google CEO Eric Schmidt.

"We should build tools to help de-escalate tensions on social media—sort of like spell-checkers, but for hate and harassment," wrote Schmidt in an op-ed published by the *New York Times*. "Without this type of leadership from government, from citizens, from tech companies, the internet could become a vehicle for further disaggregation of poorly built societies, and the empowerment of the wrong people, and the wrong voices."

Schmidt's op-ed focused heavily on terrorist recruitment and other activity, but as the FRC audience member noted, "That could easily be extrapolated over to any kind of religious speech."

Carter agreed that corporately owned websites whose board and shareholders largely oppose Christian values

could employ algorithms that block our message. "We focus right now on the individual privacy, freedom of speech issues," Carter explained. "But it's going to get to the point where our message isn't even seen by anybody and we can't even get our message out there because the algorithms are blocking it."



There is still time to prevent this future threat to religious liberty from becoming serious, says Carter. "We still have a lot of power over Twitter and Facebook, but if we wait too long we might lose the advantage we have to do something."

Carter particularly urged Christians with technological skills to take the lead and develop alternative search

engines and social media platforms "so when Facebook blocks us out we can have somewhere else to go."

Carter also reminded Christians that we have the benefit of evangelization. He encouraged Christians to build connections and personal relationships with those working in technology or in Silicon Valley. That way, our techy friends can see for themselves that our message isn't one of hate, but truth in love.

I'm thankful for Carter's thoughtful optimism and encouragement of innovation in the religious liberty debate. And, hey, if these social media threats come to fruition, well, that's certainly one way to rouse Millennial Christians to defend and protect religious liberty. Imagine the uproar...and Tweets...and, oh, the many, many hashtags. 📱



Chelsen Vicari directs the Evangelical Action program at the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

Anglicans Mobilize for Life

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Participants were encouraged to begin their efforts with prayer. Zina Hackworth, founder of a Pro-Life abstinence workshop for black adolescent girls, told of her conversion from an abortion proponent to Pro-Life educator, while Julie Kresal spoke about pregnancy loss through miscarriage and stillbirth.

"Nobody knows better what someone is going through than someone who has walked through it," shared Kresal, who experienced infertility and miscarriage.

End of Life

Summit participants addressed physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, hospice, and palliative care.

"Assisted suicide denies the dignity of the person who is killed," declared Summit speaker William L. Saunders, Jr., Senior Vice President for Legal Affairs at Americans United for Life (AUL). Saunders noted that autonomy and compassion are cited to justify physician-assisted suicide, but there are unintended consequences.

"Patients may feel not the right to die, but the duty to die," predicted Dr. Allen

H. Roberts II, Associate Medical Director at Georgetown University Hospital. "This is neither autonomy nor dignity."

Roberts, who testified before the Washington, D.C., City Council against a proposed physician-assisted suicide bill, portrayed cost and convenience as the actual motivation to enact such laws.

Morning Prayer

"This is the greatest moral issue of our time, and we must not remain silent," insisted Archbishop Foley Beach of the Anglican Church in North America. Beach spoke at a pre-March prayer service held at The Falls Church Anglican in Falls Church, Virginia, on January 22, the day following the Summit. Beach decried the "sacrificing of children to idols of materialism, convenience, and sex."

Beach also declared that "God is restoring a prophetic voice to Anglican Christianity" on life issues and spoke on Jesus' parable of the persistent widow in Luke Chapter 18. In the parable, a widow persists in seeking justice from an unrighteous judge who

eventually grants her request after tiring of her appeals. Christ explains that if the judge will give justice, surely the Lord will give justice to his elect "who cry to him day and night."

"Let us not stop knocking on the unrighteous judge's door," Beach challenged Anglicans.

Forney offered her testimony as a post-abortive woman.

"I could not stop the hurt, so I had to numb it," Forney explained as she described her coping strategy following her abortion at age 16. Forney is one of several women who speak annually at the March for Life in front of the U.S. Supreme Court building about regretting their own abortions. "For 19 years, I had denied what abortion had done—denied the life of my child."

"There are those here who have had abortions," said Beach. "God wants to heal and forgive you." 📱



Jeffrey H. Walton is the Communications Manager and Anglican Program Director at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

IRD Diary: Why United Methodists Baptize Babies

by John Lomperis

Given that confusion about infant baptism abounds across the theological spectrum, UMAction Director John Lomperis offered these brief clarifying remarks at the baptism of his own son, Josiah Wesley Lomperis, born November 17, 2015.

We realize that infant baptism causes a lot of confusion with some people, as it once did with me. So we appreciate Pastor letting me say a few brief words about what infant baptism is, and what it is not, in our United Methodist tradition.

We are not pretending that Josiah is making a choice today. This baptism does not excuse Josiah from his need, as he becomes old enough, to repent of his sin—which we expect him to show a lot of—to trust in the blood of Christ, and submit *every* area of his life to King Jesus. It does not guarantee that he will definitely go to Heaven or get God’s approval regardless of what choices he makes as he grows up.

Here are a couple things from “By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism,” the official United Methodist statement on baptism:

- Baptism is “neither essential to nor sufficient for salvation.”
- “God’s gift of grace in the baptismal covenant does not save us apart from our human response of faith.”
- “The United Methodist Church does not accept...the notion that the baptism of infants magically imparts salvation apart from active personal faith.”

So why do we, and the majority of the world’s churches, both baptizing infants, as well as adults? How was an evangelist like John Wesley able to stress the importance of personal conversion when we are of age but also of infant baptism?

Remember, Jesus actually scolded his disciples for trying to prevent parents from bringing their young children, or babies, to him. He said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14). And then he blessed the children.

Through the ages God has worked through families. In the old cove-



UMAction Director John Lomperis speaks at the baptism of his son, Josiah Wesley Lomperis, on Sunday, December 20 (photo: New Song Fellowship UMC)

How was an evangelist like John Wesley able to stress the importance of personal conversion when we are of age but also of infant baptism?

nant, babies even younger than Josiah joined the people of God through the ritual of circumcision. In the new covenant, children of parents who have active Christian faiths do so

through the sacrament of baptism, which is offered to people of all genders, races, and ages.

Since John Wesley’s day, Methodists have believed, in continuity with centuries of Christian tradition, in the words of our church’s statement: “that in baptism a child was cleansed of the *guilt* of original sin, *initiated* into the covenant with God, admitted into the church, made an heir of the divine kingdom, and spiritually born anew” [emphasis added].

And again: “The sacrament is a powerful expression of the reality that all persons come before God as no more than helpless infants, unable to do anything to save ourselves, dependent upon the grace of our loving God...”

“Neither parents nor infants are the chief actors; baptism is an act of God in and through the church.” ✚



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