

Putting our faith and values into action ...

after the election ...

Reflections by Gene TeSelle	4
The election seen from Scotland	7
Engaging a culture of insecurity, by Douglas Ottati	8
How about the values of Jesus?	12
Former Things, New Things, Abiding Things a sermon by William E. Gibson	15
"Our American Profanity" – a poem	17

... and dealing with Israel, Palestine, and divestment

a Witherspoon comment	18
a survey of the background, by Gene TeSelle	19
GA staffers fired, and some troubled queries	20-21

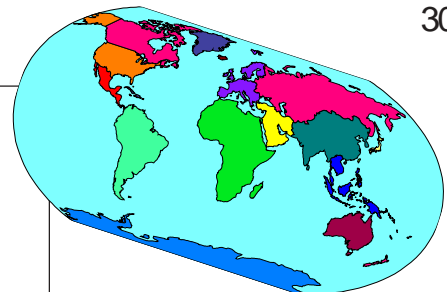
The conservative evangelical vote – an effort at understanding

by Arch B. Taylor, Jr. 25-28

The Social Creed – revisited after the election 29

The Shower of Stoles 30

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See page 33 for details!**



The President's Corner

Facing up to our privilege: White Heterosexual Privilege, that is.

by Ken Smith

At an anti-racism training this past summer, I purchased a t-shirt with the message "got privilege?" on the front and symbols on the back of the various ways that I, as a straight, white, affluent male, need to answer that question in the affirmative. My purpose in this column is to reflect on this privilege, particularly the similarities between white and heterosexual privilege. My purpose is also to help those of us who consider ourselves progressive, justice-seeking Presbyterians to understand that we are not immune from racism and heterosexism in our lives and work.

Both theorists and activists have been addressing the sin of racism more thoroughly than the sin of heterosexism. So it is helpful to start with some of the things that we have learned about racism. First of all there is the definition, agreed to by virtually everyone in anti-racism work. Racism is not just racial prejudice but racial prejudice *plus* the institutional power to enforce the racial prejudice.

Secondly, changing the laws and rules did not bring an end to racism. We are all aware that the passage of the civil rights laws of the 1960s was only a step in the process. Racial prejudice is still enforced by institutional power, and we still need affirmative action and other legal reinforcements to help to move us to a truly anti-racist society.

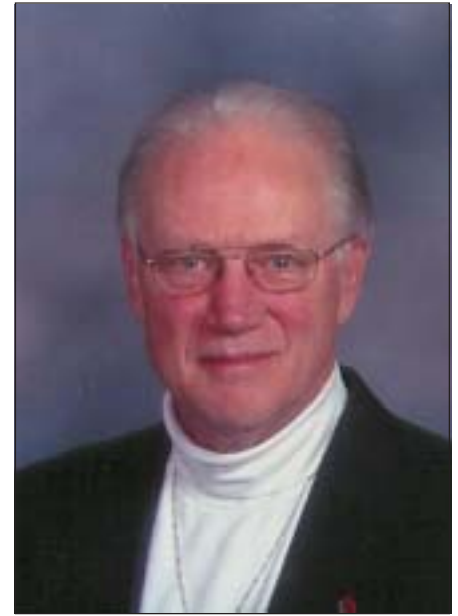
Most of us understand racism in terms of how it hurts people of color. This is still very real as we look at the harm done by white institutions and structures. Racism also hurts people of color when they internalize the understanding

of themselves as second class citizens. This self-hatred can sometimes be more damaging than the racism of white society.

What is not as well understood about racism is how it provides benefits to white people. We as white people tend to see these benefits as the normal way things are, rather than recognizing them as part of the privilege that comes of being white in our society. People of color see this quite clearly. This white privilege comes to us unbidden and is a major reason that we as whites need to acknowledge our own racism. This is not to say that we are bad people but to admit that we are trapped in the racism of our society.

Finally, since people of color understand both the harm of racism and white privilege better than white people, we, white people, need to take leadership from people of color. They know better than we do what the priorities should be, and these priorities will be different from those white folk would set on behalf of people of color.

Having set the context by looking at racism, let's look at a definition of heterosexism: heterosexism is anti-gay



Ken Smith

prejudice *plus* the power of institutions to enforce that prejudice. Certainly the ballot initiatives against gay marriage in eleven states this past November illustrated the power of heterosexism in our society. That power goes even further as individual ministers have the power of the state to enforce their negative view of gay marriage. (The power of an individual minister to enforce a positive view of gay marriage is much more restricted.)

Of course, we know that even if these eleven initiatives had all failed, this would only have resulted in a small dent in heterosexism's power. Similarly, changing the rules of the PC(USA) with regard to ordination of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons or their opportunity to marry in the PC(USA) would only be a first step in overcoming

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heterosexism. Women have been eligible for ordination in the PC(USA) for over 30 years and sexism still plays a major role in the calling of pastors. This perspective should make us more tolerant of those who disagree with us as to the tactics to be used at a particular General Assembly.

Heterosexism certainly hurts GLBT folks! One needs only to look at the anti-gay marriage position of our federal government and most states to see the tangible benefits that are denied. While acknowledging the harm to GLBT folks, heterosexual allies are not nearly as quick to acknowledge the benefits we receive from heterosexism. Like white people in relation to racism, we treat our privilege as normal. We fail to recognize as privilege that it is assumed our relationships are normal, that we can marry whom we choose and receive the financial benefits that accrue.

Finally, we heterosexual allies need to follow the leadership of GLBT folks. We are working for the ordination of GLBT people because we know that their leadership will be a gift to the PC(USA). At the same time, we often fail to acknowledge the gifts they have to offer in getting us there. Many heterosexual allies have a wealth of experience in navigating the political minefield that is the PC(USA). But we need to make this experience available to the GLBT leadership rather than assuming that it entitles us to lead.

I look forward to your comments – particularly those that challenge my understanding of white, heterosexual privilege, and that can help all of us work together toward a time when privileges and responsibilities will be shared by *all* of us.

To receive regular e-mail notes of additions to the Witherspoon website, just send a note to douging2@aol.com
Please put "web updates" in the subject line.



The Editor's Spot

After the election ...
a time for vulnerability and *respectful* compassion

by Doug King

Clifton Kirkpatrick, our PC(USA) Stated Clerk, offered a helpful insight in his recent letter to the church looking toward the season of Advent. He suggested that we can live into this season with the awareness that our world is a mess – and is not so different from the world into which Jesus was born. Again we face a time of oppressive empire, endemic violence and threats of violence, the concentration of wealth and power in a small group while masses of people live with no security, little dignity and less hope.

So how shall we observe this season of Advent and the beginning of a new year?

“Observe” is an interesting word to describe what we do with these seasons of the year and seasons of the spirit. The seasons come and go, while we are just passive spectators, watching the unfolding of events beyond our control. Certainly many progressives in the United States must feel these days that we are indeed mere observers in a nation and a world that we can barely influence, let alone control.

My sense is that right now many progressive people are looking for connections with people who share their

Continued on page 32

“Let Justice roll down”

The Witherspoon Society mission

We are a network of concerned Presbyterians responding to God's call to let justice roll down, and to work for healing in a wounded world.

Our mission is:

- To listen and learn from those who have been silenced as we seek solidarity with them;
- To nurture the prophetic voice of the church'
- To equip Presbyterians for faithful participation in the church and world;
- To challenge unjust relationships of power;
- To advocate for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and the full inclusion of all God's people in church and society.

We seek to revitalize the church's proclamation and action, informed by the whole gospel, and living into the promise of God's reign.

Revised by action of the Witherspoon Society Executive Committee,
October 1, 2004

Faith, values, religion — and the election

Maybe you've had more than enough of the election by now, but since it promises (or threatens?) to define much of our concern for the next few years, we think it may be helpful for a group like the Witherspoon Society, with its commitment to work for peace and justice in response to the call of Christ, to provide a place for some conversation about this.

Many of the items printed here have already been posted on our website, and a number of them have come to us as comments on earlier postings on the web. We'll provide links below to some of the other pieces that we are not including here.

And if you haven't already joined in the conversation, please let us know what you're thinking about all this. Just send a note to dougking2@aol.com, or by mail to his postal address, which is listed on the back page.

POST-ELECTION REFLECTIONS

Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Issues Analyst

So the voters, for a variety of reasons, have narrowly supported an agenda that includes an aggressive foreign and military policy, a self-reinforcing plutocracy fueled by tax cuts for the rich, a growing national debt, attempts to dismantle the Social Security system, termination of inheritance taxes, assaults on reproductive rights and domestic partnerships, a devil-may-care attitude in environmental and energy policies, and a Supreme Court dominated by ideological conservatives. They have voted for a corporate feudalism to which they will be increasingly beholden. They have voted, furthermore, to support a theocracy dictated by Catholic bishops and Protestant evangelicals, a Holy American Empire eager to assert its power at home and abroad. Voters may not have understood what the whole package amounts to; often they voted on symbolic grounds. But the package was made clear in many ways during the campaign.

The only consolation for those who feel like moving to Canada is that the Bush administration will have to deal with the mess it has created — things like Iraq and the national debt — and a Republican Congress must still face realities like widespread support for reproductive rights and internal division in their party over civil unions and domestic partnerships. The last Republican Revolution occurred ten years ago, and it turned off the voters. Moderate Republicans in

Congress, especially from the Northeast, will play an important role in holding off extremist legislation. A Republican-appointed Supreme Court may chip away at *Roe v. Wade* but is not likely to reverse it; the Court may also find itself forced to find some middle ground on the civil unions issue. Arlen Specter, as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, can be expected to resist the appointment of ideological conservatives, if only to minimize Democratic filibusters.

Democrats who wanted to do away with the electoral college after Al Gore's win of the popular vote in 2000 may feel more subdued after George Bush's three-and-a-half million "mandate." Who wants the country to be controlled by the red states in the South and the West without the "containment" achieved by the electoral college? On the other hand, they may want to give better expression to the blue voters in the red areas. Eventually we will probably come to some form of proportional voting, either by Congressional districts as in Maine and Nebraska, or (even better) by allocating the state's votes as in the Colorado referendum. Proportional voting, as Lani Guinier pointed out, enables people to say how they want to be represented rather than "be districted." Both parties, of course, will be turning to their computers to see how they would have fared under these various plans.

How Much of a Surprise?

Going into the 2004 presidential election we knew that the country was almost equally divided between red and blue, conservative and liberal, Fox News and CNN, church-goers and college graduates, those who want to reduce the role of government to punishing wrongdoers and those who see government as responsible for the general welfare. (Yes, that's how majorities of each of these groups voted, according to the polls.) Pundits often spoke of a "divided America," not only because of the 50-50 divide but also because most issues were framed in ways that presented clear alternatives, often diametrical opposites. Harold Meyerson in *The American Prospect* has called the election a "cultural census."

We also knew that George W. Bush, who had campaigned as "a uniter, not a divider," and who was given the presidency by a Republican-appointed majority of the Supreme Court, immediately became a divider, on the principle that the victor deserves all the spoils. Al Gore was too quick to be a good sport, not only conceding the election for the sake of "national unity" and "the legitimacy of the presidency," but declining to lead a government in exile, a shadow cabinet, or even a loyal opposition.

Bush took advantage of national unity after 9/11 to impose Draconian new laws like the Patriot Act; his Congressional allies refused to develop legislation collaboratively and played fast and loose with voting procedures when it was to

their advantage; and he dictated policy to the agencies of the federal government, creating dismay among professionals in the EPA, the Department of Energy, the Forest Service and the Park Service, the State Department, and the Pentagon.

We knew the general demographics, too.

The “blue” areas were on the west coast, the Northeast, the large industrial cities, African-American communities (both rural and urban), and university towns across the country. They included many who have been disadvantaged by corporate power (labor, African Americans, Hispanics, the poor), people who are often regarded as unworthy and unfit to vote; but they also included many who are not disadvantaged but want to find inclusive solutions that can be made effective through public policy, people who are often vilified as “elitists” out of touch with economic and cultural realities.

The “red” areas were in the South, in rural areas (both the Midwest and the “intermountain West”), in affluent suburbs, and among religious conservatives. In one way or another they buy into the language of individualism, self-reliance, personal salvation, and distrust of most forms of public assistance, sometimes even including public schools. All too frequently they convey the impression that they have an intrinsic right to rule the country, whether because of money, achievement, skin color, masculine assertiveness (no “girly men” allowed), or firmly held, uncompromising moral and religious values.

We knew that both parties were mobilizing to register voters and get them out on election day. We also knew that the Republican Party was preparing to challenge voters wherever they could, especially those who had not voted recently, or whose addresses had changed, or who might otherwise look like welfare cheats or ex-cons. In some places there was a campaign of intimidation, designed to keep people from showing up at the polls if they could not show proper identification or had outstanding traffic tickets (yes, this one was bruited about in several places).

Wild Cards

We also had some notion of the “wild cards” that might prompt people to abandon their traditional voting patterns. These were in three areas.

1. Republican campaign strategists exploited the “social issues,” most notably abortion rights and gay marriage, as wedges to separate voters — especially Catholics and African Americans — from their usual loyalties. This succeeded in some sectors despite the fact that many educated suburbanites who ordinarily vote Republican are tolerant in these areas and do not want to see prejudice enacted into law or inserted into the Constitution — and despite the fact that many Catholics and evangelicals have a broad concern for social justice and refuse in conscience to make decisions on the basis of a few “litmus test” issues.

2. Democratic campaign strategists knew that “economic issues” — stagnant economy, unemployment, inadequate minimum wage, export of jobs, growing national debt, the need to strengthen Social Security — were their strongest suit. And yet there were many voters who did not make the connection between these issues and their own lives, or who were so grateful for the \$500 rebate checks on their taxes that they abandoned the Democratic fold. In *What's the Matter With Kansas*, Thomas Frank has traced the ways working-class voters can be lured into voting against their own interests. (Suburbanites did not make the same error.) And then there was always the possibility that people who might be expected to be part of the “Democratic base” — those at the lower end of the income scale — might not see much of a difference between the two campaigns and therefore might not turn out to vote. They are grass-roots Naderites, we might say.

3. The “new fact” of the early twenty-first century is terrorism, made all the more unsettling because the most destructive actions on 9/11 were not government-sponsored but a privateering operation with no clear base and exempt from the many kinds of pressure that can be exerted on governments. Some of the

women who had supported Democratic candidates became “security moms.” George W. Bush depicted himself as the candidate who would respond to terror swiftly and surely, even though his behavior often suggested that he might be too quick on the draw and would stubbornly defend his decisions. People worried about Iraq voted for Kerry; those worried about terrorism voted for Bush. (Augustine commented that the Romans ought to have worshiped Alien Aggression as a deity, since that was always the excuse for their wars of expansion.)

4. There was also a major “perception” issue. Both Bush and Kerry graduated from Yale in the Sixties and were both members of Skull and Bones. But Kerry looked like a New England “liberal elitist,” and he even spoke French, while Bush, despite his patrician Connecticut background, managed to look like an aw-shucks Texan. It is an old story that small-town and rural people do not like being condescended to; they may feel that any complicated presentation does that, but they certainly identified with George Bush when he was dissected with ironic humor by Michael Moore and Al Franken. Their reaction was expressed in the mode of direct vilification, without a touch of irony.

Political scientists will start analyzing the realignment of the parties that has been going on since Barry Goldwater and George Wallace and still may not be finished. John Kennedy was the last non-Southern Democrat to be elected President; LBJ, Carter, and Clinton were the only ones to make it. The Democrats continue to be pulled in opposing directions: some want them to give more emphasis to traditional Democratic constituencies and programs, while others think the road to success is to move closer to the middle. Although third parties have occasionally been the catalyst for lasting realignments — the Republicans began as a third party, and much of the Progressive Party’s agenda was taken over by both Democrats and Republicans — it is clear that Ralph Nader will not play that role.

Commentators mention over and over the perception that Bush emanated “strong

leadership” and was committed to “moral values.” Many voters act on the basis of image, impulse, and one-liners. This year they may have been overwhelmed by the speed with which issues like prayer in schools, the Ten Commandments in courtrooms, and especially gay marriage, all became subjects for sloganeering rather than civil discourse and legislative creativity. Then it became easy to blame everything on “liberal elitists,” the “gay agenda,” and abortionists, as though everything would be all right except for these alien infections in the body politic.

Post-Election Reflections on the “Religion Gap”

Immediately after the 2004 presidential election, pundits made much of the “religion gap,” although there was some backtracking because of possible flaws in the exit polls, especially the one that made “values” the chief reason for the voting result. Nonetheless a majority of churchgoers did vote for Bush, and Democrats have been asking what they could have done differently.

Democratic strategists never understood or engaged the religion question, although they could have drawn upon the advice of a host of legal scholars to gain orientation for the campaign and educate the public about a complex issue.

Voters were left, then, with a misleading alternative: either religious beliefs ought to rule political discourse, and government ought to support one or more religious institutions; or religion ought to be excluded altogether from public discourse, making it what Stephen Carter calls a mere “private hobby.”

That is to ignore fifteen centuries of experience in the West. We learned, first of all, to differentiate between *church and state* as institutions, even while refusing to separate *religion and politics*, since we knew that religious concerns are relevant to the whole of life. More crucially, we learned the value of the *secular state* which has no official ties with any religious institutions but guarantees *religious freedom*, including the right to change religions or have no religion.

If religious commitments are relevant to politics but become dangerous when they invade and control politics, how are we to proceed? Recently there has been much use of the metaphor of *translation* for the move from religious to political discourse; it has been developed in a convincing way by legal theorist Kent Greenawalt and philosopher Robert Audi.

Religious convictions can best contribute to public debate, they say, when they are translated into “publicly accessible reasons.” They do not question the right of citizens, and even candidates and legislators, to express their religious convictions in civic discussion. But they argue that *coercive* laws and policies, those that constrain the activities of others, must be based upon “secular” reasons (reasons shared with others, beyond particular religious groups) that will be both convincing and workable in the secular sphere. They go on to point out that those who hold office in the executive and judicial branches, with the task of *carrying out* or *interpreting* the law, have a special obligation to keep personal religious convictions out of their actions and rulings.

It is exactly in this area of “coercive” measures that the Religious Right has tried in recent years to change the rules, claiming that it is an offense to say that religious convictions should not be expressed in laws, court decisions, and government actions. Then we find ourselves in the midst of what James Davison Hunter calls “culture wars.” Hunter suggests that culture wars have an intrinsic tendency toward Manichaeism: they are based in competing moral visions, with the result that those who disagree are placed beyond the bounds of legitimacy; as a result there is an urge to “force political solutions” rather than trust continued dialogue.

A First Amendment society can have some surprising consequences. When the courts say (for very good reasons, I would add) that government cannot directly support religious organizations and, and those same courts protect the rights of many forms of association and expression that are regarded as sinful or offensive, it is easy for religious people to

be persuaded that religion is the only thing that “gets no respect.” Then any excesses on the part of the Religious Right are regarded as an understandable reaction to a relentlessly “secular” government. To prove their point they engage in provocative acts such as putting the Ten Commandments on stone in public places or passing out tracts in public schools, then cry persecution when objections are raised.

Such actions are defended, furthermore, with the argument that religion is an “absolute commitment,” as though this makes it exempt from the rules of political behavior and even confers the privilege of defining those rules. The problem, of course, is that many competing religious groups can claim the right to carry their “absolute commitments” into the public sphere; this leads inevitably to intolerance and eventually to open religious warfare. Thus the West has chosen to keep absolute claims out of the public square and develop a viable “secular state,” while not denying that religious commitments are always relevant to issues of human good.

We have seen a stunning reversal of the position that John F. Kennedy took when he addressed a group of ministers, mostly Southern Baptists, in Dallas in 1960. His purpose then was to defuse a widespread suspicion about the Catholic church’s relation to politics. Now Southern Baptists are more likely to be allied with Catholic bishops, both on specific issues and on the relation between church and state.

Christianity has tried a number of relationships between church and state. At times either church or state claim to have the right to control the other. More often they strike a *modus vivendi*, the state dealing with “temporalities” and the church dealing with “spiritualities.” But even this *modus vivendi* can take different forms. Sometimes the state enforces religious uniformity for its own benefit, to reduce the likelihood of disagreement about the basic issues of life. At other times the church concerns itself with the moral transformation of public life, as we saw in the “social Christianity” of the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries in England and America, or in the civil rights movement of the Sixties, both of them inspired by the prophets, the gospels, and a long tradition of Christian concern for society as a whole.

It is time to resume these old discussions in the light of challenging new questions at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when we must deal simultaneously with a global economy and with close encounters between diverse religious convictions. The most reasonable and workable response is more likely to be the one championed over the last ten years by the Interfaith Alliance, the public counterpart to the Religious Right, which encourages the renewal of religious values in family and community life, but in a way that emphasizes the healing and constructive role of religion in public life, promotes open and respectful discussion of issues that affect us all, challenges intolerance in public debate, informs the community about the plurality of religious voices, and affirms the strength that diversity brings to our public life.

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July 25-31

**PATHS TO A JUST
AND PEACEFUL
WORLD**

details on
page 31

The US election seen from Scotland: four more years of “the Bush Regime”

The Rev. John Mann, an American Presbyterian pastor serving a church in Glasgow, Scotland, was asked in July 2004, to preach at the funeral of a teenage Scots soldier killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq. At the request of the soldier's family, he spoke a prophetic word of denunciation of the war. His message to Prime Minister Tony Blair and President George W. Bush, he said, would be just three words that he hoped someday would be “inscribed on the tablets of [their] hearts - and those three words are ‘shame on you.’”

He now sends this reflection on the U.S. election:

Dear Doug,

Many of us in the United Kingdom are fairly dismayed at the prospect of what four more years of a Bush presidency (they call it the “Bush Regime” here) will bring. On October 30th we staged an anti war march through my parish of Pollok, Glasgow, that was led by Rose Gentle [the mother of the young man whose funeral John Mann conducted]. About 400 people attended.

On Election Day I was in London as part of the U.K. Stop the War Coalition “Naming the Dead” vigil in Trafalgar Square. People from around the U.K were invited to read a list of names of both civilian and military casualties of the Bush/Blair war in Iraq. I read a list of 20 names of Iraqi civilians who were all killed in the same bomb blast. My parishioner, Rose Gentle, read the list that included her son Gordon. The event was led off by Stephen Hawking, Harold Pinter, and Ken Livingstone, the mayor of London.

There is great concern here for the people of Fallujah as they await the coalition forces to attack their city and experience the onslaught of what one American general described as being “whacked.” If anything, this election has renewed people's determination to oppose the war. Events are being planned around the U.K. including one next month in Glasgow.

What I find interesting about living and working here in Scotland is that the Scots are entirely honest if not blunt in the language they use to express their position and opposition. The language of their protest is a reflection of the pain this war has caused, especially in the poorest communities such as Pollok from which the military draws its “economic conscripts.”

Next week Rose Gentle plans to visit 10 Downing Street in honour of Remembrance Day, where she will lay a wreath on the doorstep, with a picture of her son Gordon, bearing the words, “Tony Blair, you murdered my son.”

The death of Gordon Gentle and the subsequent activities of his family and community have served to focus people's anguish over the war and the frustrations toward the political leaders and systems that perpetuate it. I have compared Rose Gentle to another woman who also happened to earn her living as a cleaner, Rosa Parks. One day, enough was enough, and she was tired of the injustice of having to give up her seat on the bus. Rose is tired of the injustice of having to give up her son in a war for oil and empire. She will not be moved, and the people of a nation are rallying behind her. There is hope.

Take care — John Mann

Theological musings

Engaging a Culture of Insecurity

A regular column by Dr. Douglas F. Ottati, Professor of Theology, Union Seminary/PSCE



The returns of the election of 2004 are in (Just a few days ago the State of Ohio certified its results.), and there is no shortage of commentators who claim to know just what they mean. Most make use of the “culture wars” motif.¹ Some follow Karl Rove’s lead on the weekend talk shows immediately following the election, and say that the results reflect a surge in the participation of evangelicals committed to a conservative values agenda (and against gay marriage). Others point to sharp regional splits, e.g., the blue North vs. the red South, the Democratic coasts vs. the Republican heartland. A recent cartoon combined both of these points by labeling the Northeast and the West Coast “the United States of Canada,” and much of the rest of the country “Jesusland.” My own study of a detailed and nationwide electoral map published in the *New York Times* indicates that George W. Bush carried very few voting districts located within city limits. Blue cities vs. red suburbs and countryside? A few days ago, newspaper columnist George Will complained that very many university professors in humanities are Democrats. Ellen Goodman countered that corporate boardrooms are disproportionately Republican. Blue academia, red business.

We probably should recognize that the results are still being analyzed and interpreted, that there may never be complete agreement on what they mean, and that important questions remain. Why did so many voters judge Bush the stronger leader for the “war on terrorism”? Was it a “don’t change horses” effect and, therefore, at least in part, an advantage of incumbency? Did Kerry lose by not responding quickly enough to the August attacks of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth? Hard to say. Were the returns a “mandate” for Bush’s agenda? Maybe so, although in the month following his re-election, a number of Republican congressional leaders embarrassed the administration over intelligence reform. Apparently, they were not intimidated by the President’s 52-48% victory – probably because many of them won by greater margins.

This much is certain. George W. Bush has won another four years in the White House, Republicans have strengthened their control of both the House and the Senate, and Republicans now hold most of the nation’s governorships. It’s possible, of course, that under these circumstances, Bush’s second term will be more moderate and centrist than his first. Possible, but not especially likely. Hence the collective headache that many of us woke up with on November 3.

What’s a liberal Protestant to do? Take two aspirin and descend

into a terminal funk at the prospect of Bush’s second term? Tell the Democrats how to make winning stands on “values” and religion? Stride out to do battle with evangelicals? Insist that in a post-Constantinian era, national politics are of little concern to faithful Christians? In my judgment the answer is none of the above. For liberal Protestants, the chief concern raised by the returns is not four more years of W. Neither is it the increasing cultural and political relevance of evangelical Christians (who, in any case, seem a more diverse lot than many media pundits realize). The chief concern is what once might have been called a matter of apologetics and social ethics: we appear to have failed faithfully to interpret and vigorously to engage contemporary American life. This is not something that can be corrected merely by making a few more righteous pronouncements, scolding the Democrats, or shifting our stances on a few “hot button” issues. Instead, it calls for some serious reflections in the area of theology and culture.

A big project, I know. But there isn’t any reason why we can’t make a start right here.

Our culture of insecurity

Contemporary America is complicated and diverse. It’s not just Hollywood and TV. It’s not just the Stock Market and the shopping mall. It’s not just black, white, Asian, or Hispanic. It’s not just male or female, urban, suburban, or rural, industrial or post-industrial. It’s not just Catholic or Protestant or Jewish or Muslim or Sikh. It’s not just the universities or the military, the symphonies or the playhouses. It’s all of these and more. This is why generalizations are hazardous, and why even such epoch-defining events and trends as the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and globalization, ripple through different American communities and institutions in different ways.

Nevertheless, some recent realities appear to have aroused important emotional responses among many Americans and their communities. Some recent trends and events have shaped the “feel” of American culture in ways that seem difficult and unwise to ignore. Here’s a list.

- 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq, and also the spread of nuclear weapons, e.g., North Korea, Iran
- new waves of immigrants, largely but not exclusively from Latin America, Asia, the Arab world, India, and Africa
- increasing financial and “life-style” pressures on families, e.g., mobility, climbing housing costs, the rise of two-income families and dual-career marriages
- new degrees of acceptance of gays and lesbians both as individuals and as couples by many corporations and universities (e.g., nondiscrimination policies, partner benefits), as well as in many urban areas and some “oldline” churches (part of the reason for some recent ecclesiastical fights)

Widespread emotional responses to these events and trends include the following. There is indignation and mourning at the value of what was lost in the terrorist attacks in New York City and

Washington, D. C. Many Americans feel a loss of freedom and control associated not only with the 9/11 attacks but also with some of the measures put in place as a result, such as airport security checks. Feelings of loss of control also are connected with the increasing economic pressures that seem to dictate how our lives are organized and scheduled, e.g., long hours on the job, long commutes, second mortgages. Increasing diversity brings with it increasing choices and possibilities, as almost all urban dwellers and many rural residents realize whenever they think about where to go out for dinner. Even so, for many, there is also a feeling that once dependable regularities in American life – cultural heritages and practices, expectations about sexuality, interpersonal relationships, marriage, and family – seem less stable and predictable than they once were.

For many Americans, this all adds up to a sense of insecurity and the fear that much of what they value about American life is at risk. This, then, is what I mean by “the culture of insecurity” – a social and psychic space where we not only expect to take off our shoes (and perhaps be patted down) before we fly, but also feel less safe. A society where patterns of personal relationships, marriage, and family sometimes seem out of control and at sea. This is the contemporary culture that liberal Protestants in America need to interpret theologically and engage faithfully.

The temptations of insecurity

Theologically considered (especially with the help of Reinhold Niebuhr), a culture of insecurity where people feel as if their lives as well as their way of life are at risk intensifies certain temptations.² A primary temptation, particularly in a powerful nation, will be to the classical sin of pride or of overstepping limits. As the threats that we envision multiply, we grow anxious. We then try to alter threatening circumstances by exercising our personal, economic, political, and military capabilities. We are moved to take action. And, in fact, our actions may lead to substantially creative and positive results. For example, we may gain an increased consideration of the promises or perils of a pluralist society, a stronger focus on the care and education of children, a new level of attention to the effects of western policies and interests on the social and political prospects of oil-rich countries in the Persian Gulf. But no matter how successful we may be at reducing important threats to our security, anxieties remain. We recognize additional perils. We realize that we are never entirely secure from all possible threats. We believe that there is more that we can do to guard against them. So our exercises and our actions almost inevitably are pulled toward efforts to *guarantee* our security and the security of our way of life and to banish all anxiety. This is not a possibility for finite human beings and their communities. Even so, we are tempted to protect ourselves and our way of life against the multitude of threatening contingencies through inordinate self-assertions at the expense of others.³

At this point we should raise some critical questions about recent activities, movements, and policies. Does the idea of “pre-emptive war” (which does not accord with historic canons of just war theory, and which appears essentially to be what we have

conducted in Iraq) represent an inordinate assertion of American interests and will-to-power in pursuit of the elusive goal of guaranteed and total security? Or, does it point to a tolerably just possibility in a world of terrorist organizations and weapons of mass destruction? Do some of the recent policies and practices at American-run prisons and detention centers in Iraq and at Guantanamo Bay represent destructive transgressions of justice and fairness on the part of a nation seeking its own security at the expense of others? How shall we understand abridgments of civil liberties entailed by aspects of the American Patriot Act, as well as certain aspects of the recent treatment of foreigners within our borders? What shall we make of efforts to define marriage *constitutionally* in order to secure once and for all the stability and “sanctity” of the institution as a feature of the American way of life? Again, what shall we think of the penchant of some Congressional leaders for attaching riders and amendments to virtually every piece of legislation, with the aim of further restricting immigration?

But there is another fundamental temptation as well. Individuals and groups in a culture of insecurity also are tempted to respond to their anxieties by becoming immersed in other things. They are tempted to change the subject, to change the focus of activity and attention to an area where they can satisfy desires for things that can be more easily obtained. This is what the classical tradition called sloth, or the sin of participating deficiently in life and its responsibilities. There are always the perennials – sex, drugs, and rock and roll. But for people in a wealthy society awash in scientific advances and new technologies, sloth may also take on new forms. We may choose to lose our anxieties in a vast array of drugs and alcoholic beverages. We may choose to numb the anxieties that accompany our familial, economic, and international circumstances by immersing ourselves in the pleasures of entertainment.⁴ And then there are sports, especially when combined with potent entertainment technologies and commercial appeal. (Just what are the cultural and psychological functions of the Super Bowl, its half-time show, and first-run TV commercials, in an age of insecurity?) Or perhaps we prefer to submerge ourselves and our anxieties in a cult of consumerist acquisitiveness – surrounded by innumerable products in cheerily decorated, antiseptic malls filled with seasonally appropriate canned music.

O.K., to this point I have argued that our contemporary American culture is one of insecurity and we need to criticize its typical sins. So far, so easy for your average liberal Presbyterian who, especially following Bush’s re-election, occasionally feels as if she doesn’t belong here anyway. Now for the hard part. The irony of our typical sins is that we would not be tempted to them if they were not also connected with some true perceptions. *Some important and valuable things really are at risk in our present situation.* Two that stand out are the nation and the family.

The nation: its temptations and its value

As I have already indicated, whenever we talk about nations and governments, we need to keep a prophetic eye out for distortions and corruptions. This nation (like any other) requires

concentrations of power in order to discharge legitimate functions, e.g., transportation, law enforcement, defense. This nation (like any other) can be tempted to misuse these powers – all the more so when and if it finds itself the sole remaining superpower. This nation (like any other) can become an idol in which persons and groups invest inordinate trust. Indeed, its citizens may succumb to an uncritical nationalism that leads them to support or even encourage foreign policies and strategies that violate standards of justice and fairness. And so, particularly when its interests are threatened, this nation (like any other) may become a purveyor of excessive and misdirected violence. What's more, we also may develop false nostalgic pictures that obscure harsher present realities, e.g., a simple, virtuous and united America fighting against pure evil in World War II.

Nevertheless, the denunciation of corruption cannot stand on its own. Liberal Protestants need to develop broader and deeper interpretations of the nation-state. What is it? What functions does it perform? And why would anyone, say a Palestinian, an Israeli, a Bosnian, or a Kurd, want one? What is the valuable thing we call a nation that can degenerate and become corrupted?

This is not the place to develop a comprehensive interpretation of civil government and the nation-state, but here's a hint: nations maintain, preserve, and protect a space – both literal and metaphoric – in which people may develop a common life (social and cultural goods, memories, meanings, and practices).⁵ Presbyterian liberals generally understand this to a degree. We appreciate the importance of government and courts of law for maintaining helpful national “spaces” by upholding justice and civil rights. We also appreciate the need for at least some government programs and services to promote the public good. But we often neglect the need for government to wield coercive power if it is to discharge even these functions, let alone its wider responsibilities in a fragmented and conflicted world. (Note to liberal Presbyterians: Government levies taxes in order to support courts of law, schools, roads, water treatment plants, universities, national parks, the military, Social Security benefits, and more. And, on April 15, it doesn't ask you to pay up only if you feel like it.) In particular, and in the midst of a culture of insecurity, liberal Presbyterians need to ponder the important roles of military service and the use of force in obtaining a relatively just and approximate security for the nation, its functions, and the cultural goods that it makes possible.

A good start might be to reconsider the insistence of the Barmen Declaration that “in the as yet unredeemed world” the state is characterized both by a divine appointment and by a limitation. On the one hand, civil government is appointed to provide for justice and peace, and it undertakes this task (at least in part) by means of “the threat and exercise of force.” At the same time, however, the state is also limited. It should not become “the single and totalitarian order of human life.”⁶ Indeed (taking a step or two beyond Barmen) we may say that, when it comes to the ordering of social and cultural life, institutions and communities other than the state (including churches, schools, businesses, labor unions, foundations, neighborhood associations, and more) also take up “space” and have important roles to play. But please

note: If this is an appropriate theological interpretation of the state, then there is a role for the threat and use of force, especially when it comes to protecting a relatively just and peaceful space for society and culture. And if this is so, it will not be enough for us to enjoy the benefits and protections of the nation-state and then simply say that we abhor violence, prefer pacifism, and eschew the military as well as all uses of military force. It will not be enough to protest that we are against the nations.⁷ I repeat. Particularly at a time when the United States has been attacked and when it remains at some appreciable risk, we need to ask how we understand the nation, civil government, and our participation in it. How do we affirm and appreciate the admittedly non-absolute and relative but also positive worth and value of the nation-state?

On September 11, 2001, more people were killed in the attacks on New York City, Washington, D.C, and the crash of UA Flight 93 than were killed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Neither this fact, nor the theory of the nation-state I have suggested here, means that now is the time to back down from vigorous, well-conceived criticisms of this nation and its policies or of any other nation and its policies. But it is time that we situate such criticisms within a broader and more realistic understanding of the nation, its functions, and its value. And along these lines, allow me to make a suggestion. Now is a good time for us to acquaint ourselves in some detail with the reflections of current just-war theorists and ethicists who take seriously the functions and responsibilities of nations and armies.⁸ Whatever else one may say about the chief criteria of just war theory, concerning both conditions under which nations may go to war and the acceptable conduct of war, it is undeniable that they attempt to discipline nations, their policies and their interests in accord with widely recognized moral values and limits. And it is possible that, particularly within relatively free and democratic civil societies, these values and limits will make helpful markers for public discussions and debates.⁹

The family: its temptations and its value

Now consider the family. Here too there are manifold possibilities for distortion and corruption. Rigid patriarchal hierarchies may inappropriately limit possibilities for women and children. Parents and children may neglect responsibilities to aging parents and grandparents. For many women and children, home itself is a dangerous place – replete with rapes and emotional and physical abuses. And all too often the wider family itself simply covers up such instances of destructive degeneration. Obviously, the family itself may become an idol that people trust overly much (and too exclusively) to sustain senses of meaning, purpose, and direction in their lives. There is also the distinct possibility that current insecurities and anxieties about family as a community and as an institution will generate false nostalgia for “normative” families past, e.g., “Leave It To Beaver,” “a man's home is his castle.”

Even so, it is important to recognize the many pressures people feel regarding their roles and responsibilities in the arenas of work and family. Women, who find themselves with more options than their mothers had, try to juggle the roles of wife, mother, and work

(not to mention PTA boards and church memberships). Those not working outside the home may be made to feel guilty by a society that places an inordinately high value on remunerative employment. Working couples and single parents often feel pulled in different directions by long hours on the job, lengthy commutes, the rising costs of housing, and the need to care for and spend time with spouses and children. And, of course, there are also the realities and the debates surrounding same-sex partnerships and marriages (at least some of which also provide settings that nurture and care for children). The net result is that expectations and divisions of labor and responsibility that seemed stable or even “natural” to many Americans only decades ago, now routinely come in for considerable discussion and revision.

In this context, liberal Presbyterians chronically and correctly point out that there are many forms of family, not only through history, but also (and especially) in our present society. There are single-parent families, blended families, extended families, couples with children and couples without children. We note that an emphasis on families and children in some organizations, including congregations, can marginalize singles. We are also reasonably adept at pointing out many of the more serious distortions and degenerations listed above. Once again, however, it is not enough merely to observe that there are many varieties of family as well as many corruptions. We also need to develop more positive and thoroughgoing interpretations of the family. What is the very generally distributed and quite valuable thing called family that these are forms and corruptions of?

This is not the place to develop a full theology of family, although it is a good place to suggest that our longer tradition offers some important pointers. Puritan and Reformed writers, such as Richard Baxter and William Perkins, viewed the family as an interdependent society that is structured by a marriage agreement and that tends to promote the good of persons and the public good. They believed that the married state – to which, they recognized, not everyone is called – involves weighty, sometimes wearisome duties to spouse and (should one be so blessed) also to children. In short, they regarded the family as a covenantal community and institution characterized by companionship, mutual help, and mutual responsibilities.¹⁰

Let me be clear. I know of no Puritan who sanctioned same-sex unions and gay marriages. In my judgment, however, it is possible to develop their companionate, covenantal, and mutual understanding of marriage and family in such a way as to recognize and support companionate, covenantal, and mutual same-sex unions and gay marriages. (An argument that is more difficult to make from those traditions that center marriage and family on the ability to procreate and the raising of children.) But this theologically grounded recognition and support does not derive from the simple affirmation that free and equal rational persons ought to be able to do as they please. It is not based in a celebration either of autonomy or individual fulfillment. It’s not just a matter of what free and equal consenting adults have a right to do alone in the dark. (Which is a point in favor of sexual freedom and not necessarily or especially in support of marriage

and family.) Instead, it is located within a broader, normative interpretation of the companionate, covenantal, and responsible interrelations that ought to characterize marriages and families more generally. It is grounded in the theological understanding that the valuable thing called family does not simply reduce to a strategy to enhance the freedom and personal growth of individuals.

This broader, normative interpretation also should lead us, in turn, to articulate a full schedule of responsibilities and duties that accrue to mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, uncles, and aunts (including the continuing responsibilities and duties of divorced parents to their children and to each other). It should alert us to the ways in which current social and economic pressures, as well as current libertarian cultural expectations and assumptions about isolated individual fulfillment (whether attached to same-sex relationships or heterosexual ones), tend to erode fundamental relationships and responsibilities. It should alert us as well to some of the negative consequences of this erosion for the more general and public welfare. What are the costs to persons and societies when families fail to exert themselves in caring for aging parents and grandparents? What are the costs to persons and societies when families fail to contribute to the formation of children as capable and responsible participants? Finally, our broader, normative interpretation should also motivate us to highlight values, practices, and policies that will help support and enhance the admittedly socially situated and non-absolute – but nevertheless valuable – condition for human flourishing called the family.

The challenge: creating some theological capital

Immediately following his reelection, George W. Bush said that he had built up some political capital and that now he intends to spend it. That is his judgment to make. What I’m saying here is that we liberal Protestants have not accumulated much vibrant and relevant intellectual and theological capital lately, especially in the area of theology and culture. Part of the reason, I suspect, is that we have been too impressed with pronouncements about the end of “the Constantinian era” and the church as an alternative to the nations, as well as with inflated appeals to the rights of consenting adults. In any case, we can’t spend what we don’t have. If this is so, then rather than instruct the Democrats on what they should say and do, rather than soothe ourselves with immediately satisfying and blustery condemnations of American society, rather than insist that national politics are beside the point, and rather than excoriate evangelicals for their effective political activism and participation, we ought to get to work on our own theological interpretations of contemporary American culture and society.

My further suggestions are that we might best understand our current culture as one of insecurity, and that (among other things) we should offer extended, robust, and realistic assessments of the valuable things we call the nation and the family. That, I think, is the immediate task at hand. I have only begun to outline it here. To complete it will require more reflection, discussion, and debate on the part of a great many people. But if we do accumulate some

intellectual capital by developing a serious theology of culture, then someday we can ask how we want to spend it. We may even find ourselves in a better position to make a cogent, engaging, and faithful witness.

Notes

¹ The term was brought into currency by James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Volume I: Human Nature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 178-186.

³ It is instructive to note that, at different times during the recent campaign, both candidates made statements to the effect that terrorist threats cannot be entirely eliminated and that the “war on terrorism” cannot be absolutely “won.” But each candidate paid a political price for suggesting such things and each soon returned to the safer rhetoric of hunting down the terrorists wherever they may be hiding.

⁴ I am reminded of Neil Postman’s observations in 1985 that, on American television, even the news shows are a form of entertainment, and that, largely as a result of television, public discourse increasingly takes the form of (comparatively shallow and non-perplexing) entertainment. See *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (New York: Penguin Books, Viking Penguin Inc., 1985), pp. 3, 86-88. Although there are complexities, one might argue that the trend has been intensified with the ascendance of cable TV and talk radio.

⁵ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), pp. 53-55.

⁶ *Part I of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1996), 8.22-8.24.

⁷ Possible implications of much recent theology and ethics, including dynamic, well-conceived positions of Stanley Hauerwas, as well as the christologically-inspired and semi-idealist commitment to nonviolence one finds articulated in William C. Placher, *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 147-149, 188-198.

⁸ I have already referred above to Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. In addition, see Richard B. Miller, *Interpretations of Conflict: Ethics, Pacifism, and the Just War Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Richard B. Miller, ed. *War in the Twentieth Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004); Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

⁹ In fact, recent discussions about the extent of contacts between Saddam’s regime and Al-Qaeda, the treatment of prisoners by American soldiers, and the potentially destructive consequences of taking action against a nuclear power such as South Korea relate to explicit just-war criteria.

¹⁰ Douglas F. Ottati, *Reforming Protestantism: Christian Commitment in Today’s World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), pp. 130-131, 136-137.

Values? How about the values of Jesus?

Steve Swearingen, of Anderson, SC, sent a letter to the editor of his local paper during the campaign, and shared it with us.

Dear Editor,

I read with concern an article about a survey that showed Americans believe that Republicans are more “moral” than Democrats. I think morality is not only about personal behavior but also about social behavior and policy, i.e. social justice.

In another survey, 82% of Americans describe themselves as Christian. I assume that most would agree that morality as a Christian would be following the teachings of Jesus.

I fail to see the morality in the following Republican policies:

1) Declaring and waging war on a third world country. The “Shock and Awe” campaign of President Bush, and the continued war in Iraq was and is in direct opposition to the teachings of Jesus. I am not defending Saddam Hussein, but two wrongs do not make a right.

2) Economic and political policies geared unabashedly to helping the rich and powerful. The teachings of Jesus encourage us to help the poor and the downtrodden, and historically Jesus was crucified for challenging the domination systems of His time..

3) Environmental policies in America and worldwide geared toward allowing the rich and powerful to take advantage of and often harm or destroy our natural resources and environment. The Jesus I know is for a safe and healthy environment for all, rather than allowing the rich to exploit our earth.

4) Further discrimination against gays and lesbians, with the proposal of a constitutional amendment against their marriages. Jesus teaches us to love one another even if the other is different. Jesus was a champion of the socially unacceptable in His time.

5) Spending priorities that include way too little for the sick, the aged, the poor, the hungry, the unemployed, the homeless. See Matthew 25, verse 45: “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.”

I realize that Republicans do not have a monopoly on my points, but President Bush and the current Republican leadership are leading us so far away from the teachings and morality of Jesus that it is scary to me. I think it should be, to all who try to live by the teachings of Jesus.

Sincerely,

Steve Swearingen

A response to the passage of anti-gay marriage amendments

Post-election Statement by First Presbyterian Church, Palo Alto

Palo Alto, California, November 7, 2004

The session of First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto joins a growing chorus of voices condemning Tuesday's passage of 11 anti-gay state marriage amendments as mean-spirited, materially harmful, and incompatible with the God of love revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

The indications are strong that several of these voter initiatives were placed on the ballot as part of a larger get-out-the-vote strategy designed to bring voters to the polls. Tragically, the sin of leveraging popular contempt for scape-goated minorities as a voter-turnout mechanism has a long history, ranging from the use of anti-Catholicism to anti-Semitism to racism.

We condemn the exploitation of all forms of prejudice for political gain by any political party or candidate for public office. Our nation becomes weaker whenever any of us promotes fear of the stranger as a way to increase our own power.

We affirm the power of God's unquenchable love to break down the walls of prejudice and transform human hearts, and we rededicate ourselves to continue the struggle to break down those walls and promote human transformation.

We reject the use of the Christian scriptures to condemn, demonize, and deny equal rights to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and we find interpretive arguments that seek to impose Old Testament sexual mores on American society to be intellectually bankrupt and incompatible with modern historical-critical Biblical principles of interpretation.

As Presbyterians, we affirm the interpretive Rule of Love from our own denomination's position statement, "Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture":

"Any interpretation of Scripture IS WRONG that separates or sets in opposition love for God and love for fellow human being...No interpretation of Scripture is correct that leads to or supports contempt for any individual or group of persons either within or outside of the church." [emphasis added]

We reject the claim that America should reshape its laws to conform to the Biblical interpretations advocated by a single stream of Christianity. Such an assertion weakens America by rejecting our long history of religious pluralism, and retreats from one of the foundational assumptions of the U.S. Constitution: that Americans should decide our laws using critical inquiry grounded in empirical facts, not based on any particular group's interpretations of a sacred religious text.

We affirm our commitment to the church-state separation principles of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, part of our own denomination's Book of Confessions. From Germany in 1934, the authors of the Barmen Declaration wrote:

"We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State."

We reaffirm First Presbyterian's stance as a More Light Church, welcoming gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons into full membership. Our doors are open to all LGBT people, and we stand ready to offer ceremonies of Holy Union to those same-sex couples who wish to commit their lives to each other in love before God. As Christians, as Americans, and as a people seeking to follow the God of love revealed in Jesus, we can do no less.

On gay marriage and laws against it:

Church and State: A Trial Separation

Kathleen Eschen-Pipes, a Presbyterian Minister in Santa Cruz, CA, suggests that we consider a "trial separation" between Church and State.

It's time for the State to get out of the Marriage business. The recent election saw conservative Christians attracted to the polls in record numbers partly to endorse a law against gay marriage. The arguments against gay marriage were based not on an interpretation of the US Constitution, but on an interpretation of scripture, usually the Christian Bible. These ballot measures not only deny members of society equal civil rights, but also enforce the religious beliefs of some Americans upon others.

The only way to entirely separate Church from State on this issue is for the State to cease issuing marriage licenses and conducting civil marriage ceremonies. Instead, the State should offer civil unions to gay and straight couples alike, with all of the rights previously granted to married couples. Marriages would be conducted by religious institutions alone. The only difference this would make for a straight couple would be that the legal document that they, two witnesses and a member of the clergy or justice of the peace sign would be a Civil Union License rather than a Marriage License. But such a change could make a world of difference for gay and lesbian couples.

By leaving the conduct and definition of Marriage to religious institutions, their members would be assured not only that the state will not define their religious beliefs, but that members of other faiths will not define beliefs for them. For example, some religions teach that Marriage is a sacrament and some do not. Also, some religions teach that homosexuality is a sin and some do not.

Since the language of state-sanctioned gay marriage will continue to be a stumbling block to voters on the Christian right, let's stop using it. If the definition of marriage is left to each religious organization, no one will have the right to stop a Unitarian Universalist minister from marrying a lesbian couple or signing their civil union license.

Kathleen Eschen-Pipes
Santa Cruz, CA

**AS SMART AS YOU ARE ...
WE BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW ALL OF THIS !**

(Then again, we haven't checked the facts,
so maybe they're not even true.)

The first couple to be shown in bed together on prime time TV were Fred and Wilma Flintstone.

Every day more money is printed for Monopoly than by the US Treasury.

Men can read smaller print than women can; women can hear better.

Coca-Cola was originally green.

It is impossible to lick your elbow. (Or certain other parts of your anatomy. But we'll skip that for now.)

The state with the highest percentage of people who walk to work: Alaska!

The percentage of Africa that is wilderness: 28%. The percentage of North America that is wilderness: 38%

The cost of raising a medium-size dog to the age of eleven: \$6,400

Those San Francisco cable cars are the only mobile National Monuments.

$111,111,111 \times 111,111,111 = 12,345,678,987,654,321$

"I am" is the shortest complete sentence in the English language.

Half of all Americans live within 50 miles of what? Their birthplace

If you were to spell out numbers, how far would you have to go until you would find the letter "A"? One thousand

What do bulletproof vests, fire escapes, windshield wipers, and laser printers all have in common? All invented by women.

What is the only food that doesn't spoil? Honey

There are more collect calls on what day than any other day of the year? Father's Day

Former Things, New Things, Abiding Things

A sermon by the Reverend Dr.
William E. Gibson

Director Emeritus, Eco-justice Project of the
Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP),
Cornell University

First Presbyterian Church, Ithaca, New York
November 7, 2004

Scripture readings:

Galatians 3:23-28, 5:13-14; Isaiah 42:5-9, 14-16

When you ask a preacher to preach who hasn't preached for a long time, you run the risk that he may try to do too much, so bear with me. I know there is so much more that needs to be said than I can say, but I want to make some contribution to the long-overdue debate about the life-or-death issues that will be with the world throughout this century. The election campaign did not touch them.

When I was a boy, I used to wonder whether I would make it to the 21st century. Well, I'm here, and I don't like this century. I don't like what American power is doing to the world. I don't like the historic failure of our civilization to do what it could have done to eliminate malnutrition and misery, instead of creating a global economy with an impoverished majority, an affluent minority and a small economic and political elite ruling class. And I don't like what this means for the earth, for the natural systems upon which life depends. We humans are actually making the planet hotter.

We stand, I believe, at a major historical turning point. The new century cannot simply continue the material so-called "progress" of the past. I hope it will not continue the violence.

See, the former things have come to pass, and new things
I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.
(Isaiah 42:9)

Our text comes from the section of Isaiah, chapters 40-55, that was written by someone other than the Isaiah of the earlier chapters who spoke in the 8th and the 7th centuries BC. We're now late in the 6th century BC. We don't know the name of this prophet; we call him Second Isaiah. For many decades much of the nation of Israel has been held captive in Babylon. But the Babylonian Empire is crumbling; the Persian Empire is rising. Second Isaiah sees Cyrus, the Persian king, as God's unknowing servant who will let the Hebrews go home. Their liberation is at hand. God is doing a new thing.

Israel's sins of idolatry and injustice, condemned by Jeremiah, were a former thing. So was the destruction of the temple and

Jerusalem. The power of Babylon was a former thing, and Israel's long exile would soon be over,

That was the historical setting in which the prophet discerned and spoke God's word. To hear God's word in the biblical witness, we need to know something about the historical scene. And to hear God's contemporary word, we also need to look at what is happening now, the events and conditions in the midst of which God declares former things and new things.

Former Things

So then, what are the former things that God declares in our time? I suggest four that have stayed too long and need to go.

One, the attitude of our civilization toward nature: **anthropocentrism**. It is the proud assumption that we humans stand supremely at the center of all that is, that we have the right and the wit to master nature and bend it to all our purposes, all the malls we want to construct, all the dams, all the synthetic chemicals we discharge. Nature's resources, we assume, will always meet our demands. Nature's sinks will absorb our wastes. But they won't, they are finite, they set limits. Nature's processes and cycles, which keep air and water fresh and make seed time and harvest possible, require respect. The intricate community of life inspires reverence. "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all." (Psalm 104:24) We humans have defied the wisdom of God, and we can no longer get away with it. Anthropocentrism is a former thing. It has to go.

Two, **consumerism**, our civilization's assumption that the good life consists in having more and still more things. It is an ancient fallacy. But "... a [person's] life," said Jesus, "does not consist in the abundance of his [or her] possessions." (Luke 12:15)

Dr. Peter Raven of the Missouri Botanical Gardens, speaking at Cornell last April, said that for the whole world to consume at the levels of the U.S., it would have to have the resources of several planets like earth. But developing countries emulate America, and who are we tell them no. China is rushing into the automobile age. For China to have as many cars per capita as the U.S., it would need *all* of the world's petroleum production.

Consumerism perpetuates anthropocentrism and the destruction of the earth. It is hard to see it as a former thing, but it will have to go.

Three, **the prevailing economic system**. It has stayed too long because it is inexorably geared to growth and therefore to the perpetuation of consumerism and anthropocentrism. Growth is not a - - peripheral feature of capitalism; it is of the essence. Of course poor countries need development that reduces poverty and distributes needed goods equitably. But that is not what the system does. It generates, and is ruled by, enormous concentrations of corporate power. It produces shameful inequalities. Like a cancer, it devours its natural resource base.

In the 20th century the global economy multiplied more than 17

times, while the human population more than tripled. Such growth will not repeat itself. Nature will not permit it. Whether we like it or not, we have a system that is unsustainable. It will have to go.

Four, **empire, imperialism.** The American superpower, with military bases in over a hundred countries, is the imperial force behind the global economy and the subservience of much of the world to U.S. pressures. It tries to defeat terrorism with military might, failing to see that the alternative to terrorism is a policy that gives respect and justice and hope to desperate people. But empires have always trumped justice with pride and greed.

Empire is the context of most of the biblical story: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Rome. But Jesus declared a new way: the reign of God, totally antithetical to empire. "... [the Lord] has anointed me," he said, "to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives ... to let the oppressed go free ... " (Luke 4:18)

Last June the Presbyterian General Assembly elected as moderator Rick Ufford-Chase, a young elder from Tucson, director of Borderlinks, a project in behalf of desperate, impoverished Latinos, and also co-moderator of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. At the previous Assembly he had spoken at the Peace Breakfast on "Empire and Church: Pitfalls and Priorities . . . in a Time of Globalization." He told about the brutal impact of globalization on people he knew. Accompanying a local church delegation to Guatemala, he heard Pastor Escobar and one of the Guatemalan women tell their story. The collapse of coffee prices had made it unprofitable to harvest the coffee beans. Having no future in their rural home, the teenagers take off to Guatemala City. If they manage to find a job in an export factory producing textiles or processed foods, they make about 40 U.S. dollars a week. The biggest growth industry is gang crime. Routinely, someone gets murdered for a cell phone. As young people confront the reality of no future even in the city, many opt out and join a gang or become prostitutes.

Rick told the Presbyterian Church that, "How we respond to economic empire building is going to be the defining moral issue of our time." Moral issue, he said, not homosexuality or gay marriage, but justice to the downtrodden as the basis for peace, instead of empire. Is God asking us to see that American empire is becoming, must become, a former thing?

New Things

"See, says the Lord, new things I now declare." In humility and openness to new insight we may, indeed we *must*, seek to discern what God now declares. Consider these new things.

Instead of anthropocentrism, respect for the whole community of life. Instead of toxins in air and water, a hotter planet, hills stripped of trees, eroding topsoils, declining water tables and mass extinction of species, respect, restraint, protection, restoration.

Instead of consumerism, frugality and creativity. Instead of unnecessary, wasteful, injurious overconsumption, the realiza-

tion that enough is good.

In a good society, the necessities of the many take precedence over the extravagances of the wealthy and the more modest luxuries of the middle class. Consumerism is a phony substitute for community, for mutually helpful and satisfying relationships. As we cease to crave the things we do not need, as we cut 'way back our dependence on, our infatuation with, things that make a heavy ecological impact, like cars, life may be harder, but it can be better: more creative, cooperative, convivial and generous, more attuned to the earth, more politically engaged, more spiritually enriched.

And instead of the capitalist economy, a sustainable economic system. We *must* have an economy that does not have to tenaciously promote consumerism, that does not destroy the earth.

President Jeffrey Lehman of Cornell recently proposed a major new initiative on sustainability. "For a variety of reasons," he said, "our current mode of life on Earth cannot be sustained indefinitely." He spoke about the need for "some form of adapting innovation, some form of substitute approach before time runs out." (*The Ithaca Journal*, October 30, 2004, p. 3B) Yes. And this is more than about rational proposals for wise changes. It is also about power, about who runs and controls the economy and the government, about the opposing force that has long stood in the way of the wise changes that could have been made in energy policy and development policy to make them equitable and sustainable.

The purpose of the economy has to be a sustainable sufficiency for all. The sustainable economy will be decentralized, with local resources carefully conserved and applied to local needs, with each country and region as self-reliant as possible, with renewable resources continuously renewed, with a solar or a solar-hydrogen energy base and with participation by all members of the community in decisions about good work and appropriate sustainable community development.

And instead of empire, a radical decentralization and democratization of power. Instead of one lone globally dominant superpower, a decentralized world community committed to collective security and sustainable sufficiency throughout the world. International institutions will encourage and facilitate regional and local initiatives and build mechanisms for cooperation and sharing.

We shall stop pleading in vain for the empire to be benevolent. We shall need to renounce the concept and the legitimacy of empire, and insist that power be limited and shared. This will have to begin with the recovery of American democracy – with nonviolent organization, mobilization and struggle to re-create democratic self-governance as protection against the corruptions of power and as an instrument of the common good.

If these new things sound revolutionary, it should not surprise us. The gospel is revolutionary. Its revolution has waited long to happen, and God's timeline extends far beyond our finite vision.

But now the stakes are higher – the survival and the goodness of life.

Abiding Things

In our response, we are directed and empowered by the abiding things, the constancies of God's character and will,

The call to covenant faithfulness abides. For the people of God, decisions about what to do are not just matters of prudence and rationality. They are about loyalty to Jesus, who asks us to deny ourselves and thereby find abundant life, to gain life by losing it for his sake, the gospel's sake and the gospel's revolution.

The call to participate with God in history abides. We are equipped by the biblical story, with clues to God's presence with us and God's leading of us.

I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:6-7)

We are participants in God's project of liberation, and this gives life meaning and purpose.

The law of love abides. We are free from bondage to sets of rules, old ways, entrenched systems. No law, no way, no system binds us unless it expresses love, unless it intends what is best for all affected by it. "You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters," wrote Paul; "only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:13-14)

And the grace of God abides, the grace of our righteous, loving, forgiving, steadfast God, who wills our good, whose purpose in history transcends our time but gives meaning to it, so that our participation is limited and incomplete but significant and fulfilling.

We have no blueprint for our participation. We have to keep looking and listening, pray and probe, analyze and debate, not to defend our interests but to find the truth, the way. And when you say you cannot see, remember this:

I will lead the blind [says the Lord] by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them. (Isaiah 42: 16)

So be it. It will be a great adventure. Amen.

Our American Profanity

We obsess with national security
as we defile the world with greed,
worshiping our Humvees and
exalting our presidential messiah.

Yet, security comes from peace,
and peace derives from
yielding to justice/righteousness
in the course of human affairs.

Still, the specters of Olympus
trumpet their terrible twaddle
of "freedom," while
repressing any who resist.

Alas! Their brutality is no sign
of a godly age to come,
only a desecration of the garden
that God has planted for the poor .

Shalom and Salaam,
Bill

From the Rev. Bill LeMosy, an interim ministry
specialist living in Pleasant Hill, Iowa

Are you on our Witherspoon members e-list?

We've built a list of about 400 of our members, to whom we send occasional notices that we think are worth your time and attention.

If you haven't received any of these notes, we've somehow missed your e-mail address, or haven't updated it — and we apologize!

Please send your current e-mail address to
dougking2@aol.com

And add a note saying you want to be included on
the Witherspoon Members e-list. Don't get left out!

Israel and Palestine, and charges of anti-Semitism: a Witherspoon comment

Israel and Palestine, and charges of anti-Semitism

The Witherspoon Society Executive Committee supports the statements of the 216th General Assembly on Israel and Palestine, and applauds the efforts of our national staff and Moderator to maintain communication with the Jewish faith community and others about the very difficult issues involved.

More reports and opinions on the Israel-Palestine controversy follow this. If you have comments on the statement and background that follow, we invite you to share them by e-mail (douging2@aol.com) or plain old mail to Doug King, at the address listed on the back page.

Doug King has prepared the following points in conversation with the Executive Committee.

Since the close of the 216th General Assembly in early July, 2004, there have been many expressions of concern about Assembly actions relating to Judaism and the state of Israel. Discussions have often become heated, perhaps generating more heat than light. Postings of various views on the Witherspoon Society website have offered plenty of both.

This leads us, as the Executive Committee of the Witherspoon Society, to suggest a few ways of looking at this difficult and important discussion that we believe might make our discussions more helpful.

Following these propositions, or starting points for discussion, we offer a background survey of the debate, authored primarily by Witherspoon's Issues Analyst, Gene TeSelle. This discussion has been going on among members of the Executive Committee for several months. We are not speaking lightly or unadvisedly. On the other hand, we acknowledge that these are difficult issues, and not all of us take the same position when it comes to nuances.

Some starting points for the discussion:

1. The General Assembly actions reflected the Assembly's attempts to be faithful to historic Presbyterian commitments to peace and justice. We believe those commitments should continue to shape our thinking and our policies.
2. Many Presbyterians have been influenced by deeply felt experiences and encounters with Christians and others in Israel/Palestine. Presbyterians should continue to seek such experiences as far as the situation in Israel/Palestine permits; those experiences and contacts should continue to help shape our thinking.

3. The Presbyterian Church has often affirmed and supported the right and legitimacy of Israel. Given the shameful treatment of the Jews over so many centuries, and their persistent commitment to the rights of others, we would hope that their historic compassion might continue in relation to the Palestinian people, who are in so many ways victimized and marginalized. We recognize the legitimacy of Israeli fears of violence, and agree that actions by some Palestinians also violate basic human rights to safety and security.

4. Nevertheless we must also affirm, with the Presbyterian General Assembly, that criticism of Israeli policies and actions is not necessarily anti-Semitic, any more than criticism of U.S. policy is necessarily anti-American.

5. It is important to be aware that numerous responsible Jewish groups and leaders have been critical of Israeli policies and actions, including Jewish Voice for Peace, Tikken, Hamoked (Center for the Defence of the Individual, an Israeli organization dealing with injustices against Palestinians), as well as the Middle East Children's Alliance, with a similar concern for the Occupied Territories.

6. The Presbyterian Church has also affirmed that the rights of the Palestinian people for a state of their own should not be denied. The majority of American Jews seem to agree that any solution to the conflict must include a Palestinian state. It remains to be seen how mutual recognition might be attained.

7. Disinvestment — using invested funds as a way of working for change in corporate and government policies — has been used for many years by the Presbyterian Church and other religious groups. The PC(USA) has used this as a means for dealing with urgent concerns such as South African apartheid, the production and marketing of tobacco and of munitions, unjust labor practices, and more. In this instance there has been no suggestion of withdrawing investments from Israel, but only of considering investments in U.S. corporations that are providing support for the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. See <http://www.pcusa.org/mrti/> for more information.

8. We affirm the need for more conversation, both respectful and honest, among all the groups with a stake in this important matter: Jews, Muslims and Christians; people of Israel, Palestine, and the United States.

9. Peace can be built in Israel and Palestine, as anywhere else, only by building justice. Our conversations must deal with our various perspectives on both peace and justice, and seek new ways of building both.

10. We all might help this difficult process by approaching it with humility. We each bring to it our strong convictions and our own varied experiences, but none of us comes with a complete understanding of the situation, or with a perfect grasp of the values at stake. May we join in a journey toward justice and peace, helping one another along that difficult road.



Israel and Palestine, and charges of anti-Semitism

A survey of the background, by Gene TeSelle

The 216th General Assembly in late June, 2004, took four rather distinct actions involving Jews and the state of Israel.

In response to concerns about a “Messianic congregation” established in Philadelphia, it commissioned a study to re-examine and strengthen relationships between Christians and Jews with particular attention to its implications for Presbyterian evangelism. At the same time, it turned down a related motion to withhold any future mission development grants for “messianic congregations” prior to action on that study.

It adopted a statement rejecting “Christian Zionism” as not representing “the majority of American Christians and the faith of the Presbyterian Church (USA).”

It condemned the building of the “security barrier” to separate Palestinian from Jewish territory, and specifically the route of the barrier, which does not follow the agreed line of demarcation.

It urged authorities in the United States, Israel and Palestine to renew efforts for peace; it also mandated a “selective divestment” from multinational corporations operating in Israel, specifically mentioning the use of Caterpillar tractors to demolish Palestinian homes.

The first two actions concern interfaith relations; the latter two deal with international or interstate relations. But the reaction indicates that these cannot be kept separate, and the apparent linkage between them has created some intense responses.

It took several days for the Jewish response to come, but it was an alarmed one, perhaps based at first on incomplete information.

The Anti-Defamation League began it;

then there were attacks from lawyer Alan Dershowitz and an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*. The Presbyterians were depicted as being engaged in an assault on Jewish identity by renewing old attempts to convert Jews, and on the state of Israel by condemning the security barrier and even thinking about divestment. This led to charges that there was no criticism of what was seen as the far worse behavior of the Palestinian terrorists, and that Israel was being equated with South Africa, the target of the last famous divestment campaign.

It would have helped if more publicity had been given to the specific concern about Caterpillar Inc., which supplies bulldozers, some of them armored, that are being used for the destruction of Palestinian homes. These are paid for by the U.S. government, but neither Caterpillar nor the U.S. government seems interested in placing restrictions on their use.

It is important to know that these were four distinct actions, with different histories, approved for different reasons. It is also important to be aware that General Assembly actions are taken under some time pressure, sometimes with incomplete information, and by divided votes in General Assembly committees and plenary sessions. The initiative for the first action seems to have come from the “conservative” or “evangelical” sector of the church; for the third and fourth actions, from the “progressive” sector. The latter two were initiated by people who have been on the scene, interacting with Palestinians (many of them Christians, though we often forget it), who have felt revulsion at some of the actions of the Israeli army in the Occupied Territories.

Reaction from Presbyterian conservatives

Presbyterian conservatives publicized these criticisms extensively, consistent

with a recent pattern of distrust expressed by conservatives toward the General Assembly and its officers – a pattern we regret and with which we disagree.

We are aware of no suggestions for improving relationships, beyond condemnation of the General Assembly’s actions. There was even a proposal to reconvene the General Assembly to overturn the Assembly’s actions.

The Presbyweb website continues to link to many opinion pieces critical of the Presbyterian action.

At the same time the Frontier Fellowship sent its own advice to those engaged in dialogue with Jewish leaders: that “contextualized evangelism,” following the mandate to preach the gospel to all peoples, cannot exclude Jews from its scope. This appeared in part to justify the controversial “Messianic” congregation in Philadelphia.

On “Messianic” Christianity

We must acknowledge that fifteen centuries of Christian pressure upon Jews, including coercion, genocide and, more frequently, segregation or second-class citizenship, has created a hostile context within which Jews hear the Christian message. Acknowledging this heritage of violence, many Christians have emphasized one of the classical views, that Israel and the Church share the same grace and the same faith, but with different symbols, rituals, and modes of life. On that reading, Christians need not urge Jews to abandon their heritage in order to become full members of the Christian community when they so choose.

While we must reject certain methods of proselytizing, especially when they define salvation as exclusively Christian, we must also respect the affirmation of both Christian and Jewish heritages for per-

sons who claim both. We wish to avoid a view precluding Christianity from being anything other than a “gentile” religion. We understand our original church as having been Christian Jews and that Jewish Christians were part of the Christian community into the fifth century. Some people in the modern world believe that this combination expresses their present faith and lived reality. However given the history of Christians and Jews we can well understand Jewish concerns regarding this sensitive area.

Many Jews think that the very idea of Jewish Christianity is contradictory — that one who becomes a Christian ceases to be a Jew, and perhaps has become an

enemy of Judaism. This unfortunately gives normative status to the “replacement theology” of the Gospel according to Matthew, and to the much-controverted “blessing against the heretics and Nazarenes” that took shape between 80 and 150 CE.

On Israel and Palestine

As time passed after the General Assembly, the “Messianic congregation” issue was less emphasized and the focus moved to the Presbyterian criticisms of Israeli policy. Jewish leaders apparently recognized that the call for further study was a Presbyterian way of saying that any further Messianic new church

developments are likely to be scrutinized very closely.

It is interesting that the condemnation of Christian Zionism as incompatible with Reformed doctrine got almost no attention, though we know that hope for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and their conversion to Christ is an important motivator for some Christians, making them strange allies with some Jewish groups that have no intention of converting in the “last times.” Christian Zionists often insist that there are no “occupied territories,” since the whole area is Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel, promised in perpetuity to Israel. We believe this literal reading of a religious text as to how God will save the world is inappropriately applied in this political context, and used in this way could have dangerous and unjust consequences for the Palestinian people.

The focus has come to be upon the Assembly’s criticisms of Israeli policy. The controversy shows no signs of cooling down. On July 21 Bnai Berith called for an end to dialogue with the Presbyterians until these actions are reversed. Especially because of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial, there were Presbyterians all over the country who asked, “Did we really do this?”

In many communities, Jews who had engaged in common endeavors with Presbyterians asked about it with alarm. And local Jewish leaders all over the country seemed to be mobilizing to confront Presbyterian ministers. It may be that group meetings should be encouraged, as being more constructive in the long run than individual encounters.

Once again we are hearing passionate statements about why Jews, even those who are most critical of Israeli policies, react as they do to statements like the ones made at the recent General Assembly. They are deeply concerned that Israel’s right to exist not be taken away. They sometimes say that they feel personally threatened, both in their Jewish identity and in their very existence, when they hear critical statements. These fears are deeply rooted in the

The “blessing against the heretics” (*birkath ha-minim*), written by Samuel the Small, was added to the Eighteen Benedictions recited in synagogues and in daily prayer, probably about 80-85 CE. This was the time after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, when the Pharisees, who, like the Nazarenes, had been one of a number of Jewish sects, made good their claim to represent the authentic Jewish tradition.

Early Christian writings indicate that followers of Jesus were disciplined “in the synagogues” (Mt. 10:17) or were treated as “outside the synagogue,” *aposynagogoi* (Jn. 9:22, 12:42, 16:2). Perhaps because of this, Matthew has strong statements against the “scribes and Pharisees” (Mt. 23), depicts the Jewish crowd as taking responsibility for Jesus’ death (Mt. 27:25), and sees the church as a replacement for Israel; John calls the Jews the children of the devil (Jn. 8:44) and speaks of “other sheep not of this fold” (Jn. 10:16).

In some early manuscripts of the benediction, it is directed against both the “heretics” and the “Nazarenes.” Since the middle ages, probably as a result of Christian pressure, “Nazarenes” has been removed, and only the heretics are mentioned.

Recent scholarship has raised a number of questions, probably with irenic motives. Perhaps it was originally a general prayer against *minim* or heretics, who could have included Jewish Gnostics as well as Nazarenes and other Jewish sectarians. Perhaps the term *notsrim* was added during the second century. Perhaps this word did not even refer to the Nazarenes, for there were other possible meanings.

Furthermore, it is pointed out that the *birkath* did not directly exclude heretics; as Schmithals puts it, they were not “denounced” but “renounced.” But each time the blessing was read in the synagogue it raised the question of heresy, forcing either conversion, abstention from leadership roles, or absence from its worship.

Nils Dahl has suggested that the Jews and the Christians, like Jacob and Esau, were siblings who struggled with each other in the womb, that is, during the formative period after 70 CE. For most of the intervening centuries it has been assumed that Christianity is a Gentile religion and that a Jew who becomes a Christian ceases to be a Jew. The question today is whether the mutual rejections found in the *birkath ha-minim* and in the passages in Matthew and Luke remain normative for us. An alternative, of course, is put forward by Paul in Romans 9-11.

history of the Jewish people, and for many of them in personal experience as well. While we may believe that this fear does not need to be a response to our actions and intentions as Presbyterians, the fear exists, and it is a major factor in Jewish-Christian encounters. Both Jews and non-Jews might recall similar fears of indifference or hostility that other groups feel—people living with HIV/AIDS, same-sex partners who find their contractual rights being negated by state laws, the homeless, victims of genocide in many parts of the world. We need to listen to the concerns of Jewish people for their safety and their identity, and find ways to work through those concerns.

Discussions of the “security barrier” are especially revealing. Critics call it a “wall,” which Jews hear as a comparison with the Berlin Wall. Jews often call it a “fence”—even though it is 12 to 15 feet high, and in many places is a 25-foot high concrete barrier—and they feel that it is necessary for the security of Israel. At the same time many Jews acknowledge that the route of the barrier is a large part of the controversy, for in places it does not follow the internationally agreed line; even the Israeli courts have called it into question.

Our church’s statement expressed concern about the barrier’s negative impact on the economic livelihood of many Palestinians and, more generally, that barriers between people are usually a problem, not a solution—whether they are built by Israel or the United States or any other nation. Jake Young reports from Springfield, Illinois, a rabbi’s declaration that, when the chips are down, Jewish survival must be chosen over any consideration of economic hardships. At that point, when basic differences actually were expressed, he says, his Christian colleagues started to slip down in their chairs or look at the floor. He comments, “I have not run into a Jewish dialogue partner who acts that way.”

Often the complaint is made that the PC(USA) did not call for a similar disinvestment from companies doing business with the Palestinian Authority. That seems to be an unlikely option, for

two reasons. There is almost no “economy” in the Palestinian areas, cut up as they are by the network of Israeli settlements steadily creeping into the Occupied Territories. And any imports into the Palestinian economy are scrutinized and controlled by the Israelis, who exercise full sovereignty over the Occupied Territories. Supplies continue to go to terrorists, but by clandestine means, not through open trade that could be affected by disinvestment.

A number of participants in the recent discussions have said that a major concern is the way some pro-Palestinian activists fall into anti-Jewish ways of speaking, complaining about the “Zionist press” and claiming that the U.S. Congress is “under occupation” by the Israeli government. On the other side, supporters of security for Israel may too easily denounce as anti-Jewish all criticisms of the current Israeli government.

As for taking on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, some brave Jews are doing just that. But such a stance is becoming more difficult, because as Israel moves toward another election, there are candidates to Sharon’s right who make him look moderate. (Analogously there are Palestinians who make Arafat look moderate, and Colin Powell is a moderate voice in a more hawkish Bush administration.) That’s the nature of political reality: relative differences, however small, may make a great difference in the long run.

We have heard expressions of concern from progressive Jewish leaders at the national level, asking why there was no conversation with members of the Jewish community before these actions were formulated. They feel that their credibility in the Jewish community has been made more vulnerable to attack by right-wingers, who accuse much of the leadership of Reform Judaism of betraying Israel by even being part of “left-wing” and “dovish” interfaith coalitions. They felt blind-sided by their allies. It may help to make clear that these actions were not drafted in advance by GA agencies or groups, but came to the Assembly through overtures and commissioners’ resolutions, which provided far less

opportunity for advance dialogue.

Where do we stand now?

Early in the controversy the Stated Clerk issued a comprehensive statement of the positions taken by the PC(USA). And in response to a letter from members of Congress scolding the PC(USA) for this action, Kirkpatrick sent a reply expressing regret at the inaction of Congress, as well as Israel and the Palestinian Authority, in carrying out peace accords that are now more than a decade old. These and other items can be found through a special web page on the PC(USA) website.

Even with all the tensions over the General Assembly actions, new efforts at dialogue are proceeding. There are some, however, who demand a total recantation of some of the statements made at this General Assembly. That is not likely to happen. But we may hope for more clarification of the long-time policies of the PC(USA) concerning both Israel and the Palestinians, explanation of the recent controversial actions, and new statements that fill gaps and try to reduce the possibilities for misunderstanding.

Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase met with a group of Jewish leaders in New York on September 28. While (as Kirkpatrick said) “no one’s minds were changed,” the meeting did allow airing of concerns and facts, and led to some basic points of agreement and suggestions for future conversations, which Kirkpatrick laid out in a letter to presbytery and synod Stated Clerks and Executives.

In spite of the problems, we are hopeful that the controversy has placed our church’s concern for a just peace in the Middle East in a clear spotlight, both within the PC(USA) and in the public forum. We hope that this can be the occasion for a clear, positive social witness, and for stronger interfaith dialogue.

We hope that the simple perspectives we have outlined above might help in this important process.



Two staffers gone in wake of Hezbollah meeting

GAC deputy executive Lueckert, ACSWP coordinator Sulyok are out

by Alexa Smith, Presbyterian News Service

LOUISVILLE — November 11, 2004 — Two key Presbyterian Church (USA) staff members were apparently fired early this morning by General Assembly Council (GAC) Executive Director John Detterick — with no clear public explanation for their departures.

According to a memo released this morning, Kathy Lueckert, the deputy executive associate director of the GAC, the governing body of the church's mission program agency, and the Rev. Peter Sulyok, coordinator of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), are no longer employed by the GAC.

Lueckert has served the denomination for five years, Sulyok for nearly twelve.

Lueckert supervised Sulyok and both were members of an ACSWP fact-finding delegation to the Middle East last month that included a televised meeting with Hezbollah, an organization that is on the U.S. government's watch list of terrorist groups.

The meeting and its widespread airing on Arabic television drew immediate protest from Jewish groups and from some within the PC(USA).

In a memo released to GAC staff, Detterick implied that legal reasons prevent disclosing why the two staffers are no longer employed by the PC(USA). He said that he intends to begin searching for an interim deputy executive director before the year's end. Staff under Lueckert's supervision will temporarily report to Detterick.

Oversight of ACSWP has been delegated to the Rev. Curtis Kearns, the director of the PC(USA)'s National Ministries Division.

Detterick's other published comments were succinct:

"It is with sadness that I tell you that Kathy Lueckert's tenure as deputy executive director has come to an end today. Kathy has made contributions to the work of the GAC and for that I will always be very grateful ... I am also sorry to tell you that Peter Sulyok is leaving the GAC. Peter, too, has contributed much, especially to the work of ACSWP."

He concluded, "I know these decisions raise many questions for staff, but please realize that all staff have the right to confidentiality regarding their employment. Therefore, this is all I can say. I am keeping Kathy and Peter in my prayers and hope you will also."

Detterick told the *Presbyterian News Service* that it is not appropriate to comment further on personnel matters.

The Oct. 14 meeting in southern Lebanon between the ACSWP-led delegation and Hezbollah leaders was immediately declared "misguided" by top leadership here and comments made by Ron Stone, a Pittsburgh elder and member of the delegation, were described as "reprehensible" by Dettrick and others in a post-meeting letter to Jewish organizations pleading with them to remain in dialogue with the PC(USA).

Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and Rick Ufford-Chase, the moderator of the 216th General Assembly, also signed the letter.

The PC(USA) has just begun dialogue with major Jewish organizations who want the denomination to overturn the 216th General Assembly's decision to selectively divest itself of stock held in multinational corporations who profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestine unless those companies change their business practices.

Stone's remarks came after the group toured the Khiam Detention Center, a

former Israeli prison and torture site in southern Lebanon, which is now a Hezbollah-run museum and memorial.

In a joint press conference, Stone thanked Hezbollah for "goodwill" it had expressed toward the American people and he added, "As an elder of our church, I'd like to say that according to my recent experience, relations and conversations with Islamic leaders are a lot easier than dealings and dialogue with Jewish leaders."

News of the meeting and Stone's comments drew immediate condemnation from Jewish groups.

As Detterick's top deputy, Lueckert carried oversight responsibility for several major GAC operations, including communication, mission funding, human resources, social policy development, women's and racial ethnic concerns, and its legal and research arms.

Prior to working for the PC(USA), Lueckert spent 15 years in local government. Her family tree includes Presbyterian ministers reaching back 10 generations.

A clergyman, Sulyok has headed the PC(USA)'s social policy development since February, 1993. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1980 and did post-graduate work there.

He was a pastor for seven years in Binghamton, NY, and did interim work in New Jersey while he studied at Princeton.

For more information and reflection

on

Israel, Palestine, and the divestment issue

and

on the election

and questions of value

and religion

and *lots* more

just go to

www.witherspoonsociety.org

Presbyterians, the Middle East, and our Church Executives: Some Troubled Queries

by Gordon Shull

Gordon Shull, an elder in the First Presbyterian Church of Wooster Ohio, and a frequent participant in presbytery and synod activities, is an emeritus professor of international relations at the College of Wooster. His teaching often engaged Middle East issues, and he attended the Presbyterian Study-Travel Seminar in Israel and the West Bank, led by Ben and Carol Weir in 1989. He holds degrees from Yale Divinity School and the University of Illinois. He can be reached at 330-264-2103, gbshull@sssnet.com, and 824 Northwestern Ave., Wooster, OH 44691.

Surely I am not the only one who yearns for much, much more information about the events leading up to the dismissal of two of our executives who had participated in an interview with Hezbollah leaders and with the press.

A. Some preliminary questions:

1. Who sponsored the trip to Israel/Palestine? Who planned the itinerary? And what was the itinerary?

2. What groups or persons were on the itinerary? What groups or persons made up the delegation?

3. How did the possibility of meeting with Hezbollah leaders arise? How was the decision made to meet with them? Is it true that Mr. Detterick had instructed members not to meet with Hezbollah? If so, what was his authority for issuing this instruction? How was that instruction considered, both by the entire group and those who were dismissed, when the opportunity arose? How has the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy responded to this action toward its delegation?

4. What happened at the meeting with Hezbollah leaders? What did the Presbyterians hear, and what did they say? Did they engage in serious dialogue about the ethics as well as the prudence of suicide attacks? Had they engaged in serious ethical discussion with Israeli leaders?

5. Is it true that Mr. Detterick instructed the group not to have any press conferences? How did the possibility of a press conference, or press coverage,

arise? How did the group respond to this possibility? What else happened besides a statement by Ron Stone? (Would we agree that a statement made by one member of the group should have no bearing on the larger question of the Christian justification of meeting with Hezbollah, and none on the more specific question of the fitness of others for responsible office?)

B. My curiosity is piqued by the following convictions:

1. As Christians called to love our enemies, to acknowledge our own sinfulness, and to be reconcilers, we should seek out all who consider us or our allies to be enemies. In a situation fraught with moral ambiguity on all sides, should we not talk to people of all sides? Might this not be an opportunity to learn from, and to influence, people who have come to see us as their enemy?

2. It is a violation of our own integrity, our own mission as a church, to take instruction about whom to confer with, on a peacemaking and fact-finding journey, from any secular or religious group. Why does the label "terrorist," applied to Hezbollah by the United States government, automatically mean that we should not talk to Hezbollah leaders, especially when our church has condemned terrorism and has also acknowledged the extreme pain under which Palestinians have suffered for half a century? We recall that Menachem Begin and other Israeli office-holders were labeled terrorists during Israel's war for independence.

And should the objections of a particular

group of Jewish leaders, with whom we are engaged in delicate conversation, automatically control our attempts to be faithful to our mission to love, to understand, to confer with, those who have come to believe that we and our allies are enemies?

3. We can condemn suicide bombings – as the General Assembly has repeatedly done – and still believe that we can best serve the cause of peace with justice in our time by talking to our enemies as well as our friends.

C. These questions become more poignant as we realize that a great many Jews - including many connected with the Tikkun Community, Americans for Peace Now, Jerusalem Women Speak, and many others - **are hospitable to the positions taken by the General Assembly.** Are we engaged in serious conversation with groups like the Tikkun Community, Americans for Peace Now, and Jewish Voice for Peace? How do they view a Presbyterian study-travel seminar decision to meet with spokespersons across the left-right spectrum?

D. I cannot respect a decision to dismiss two (or more??) valued servants of the church until I have had authoritative answers to these questions. The answers should be solicited from the dismissed employees as well as the dismissers. At the very least, is it not imperative that the General Assembly Council explore all of these questions thoroughly, with both the dismissed and the dismissers? To do less is to be unfaithful to the General Assembly Council's high calling - and also, perhaps, to forget lessons taught several years ago by the Dirk Ficca episode.

Indeed, it is tempting to recall the Ficca experience. In the course of an eloquent, sensitive discussion of interfaith dialogue Ficca posed a Christological question in colloquial language ("So what is the big deal about Jesus?"). These words were wrenched from context ... without realizing that the question led directly to a serious discussion of

Continued on page 29

More resources on Israel/ Palestine and the divestment question

Discussion (a term which may be a bit mild) continues about Israel, Palestine, and statements made by the 2004 General Assembly, especially suggesting that the PC(USA) divest stocks it holds in Caterpillar, Inc.

We have provided a variety of resources that you can find by going to http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/israel_actions.htm. Some comments were also published in our Summer 2004 issue, pp. 9 - 12.

But here are a few more items you may find helpful as the debates continue. You'll find this list on our website, with clickable links to all the sources mentioned. Just go to http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/resources_on_israel.htm

On human rights in Israel/Palestine

Some people have been raising questions about the PC(USA)'s concern for the human rights of Palestinians, as if there has not been equal concern for the rights of the people of Israel, and of other nations around the world. The new edition of PC(USA) Human Rights Update is now available online and is clear evidence of our denomination's concern about human rights around the world. On pages 33-40 you will find a discussion specifically on Israel. This annual report on human rights has been done since 1989. The church is also deeply concerned about terrorism, and approved a major study paper on that subject at the 2004 General Assembly.

For a few recent glimpses into the situation:

The Washington Post (Nov. 27, 2004) had an article about the tragic killing of a Palestinian school girl by Israeli Defense Forces. The same edition has a brief interview with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The Washington Post for Nov. 28 carried an article titled "Checkpoints Take Toll on Palestinians, Israeli Army."

The respected organization Human Rights Watch has recently urged that Caterpillar Inc., the U.S.-based heavy-equipment company, should immediately suspend sales of its powerful D9 bulldozer to the Israeli army, because the Israeli military uses the D9 as its primary weapon to raze Palestinian homes, destroy agriculture and shred roads in violation of the laws of war.

Other resources

The special PCUSA web site on Israel and Jewish relations

has some good basic points at <http://www.pcusa.org/israelandjewishrelations/faq.htm>. It has been noted that this website unfortunately has no articles by Palestinian Christians.

Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick has written two helpful letters, one reporting on a meeting of Presbyterian Church leaders with a number of leaders from the Jewish faith community. The other responded to criticisms leveled by a number of members of Congress, and includes helpful information on the plight of Palestinians.

There are a number of relevant news stories from PCUSA (again, these are not linked to the special PCUSA web site on Israel & Jewish relations, but there are links on the Witherspoon page mentioned above).

PCUSA's *Church & Society* magazine for September/October 2004 is titled "A Wall of Security, a Barrier to Peace." It is filled with articles and statements from a range of voices. The 121-page issue includes a large fold-out map and details on the PCUSA actions regarding the question of divestment. Ten or more copies are \$2.50 each plus shipping and handling. To order contact: c-@ctr.pcusa.org or call 1-888-728-7228 ext. 5810. Also, the September/October 2002 issue of *Church & Society* focused on Mission Responsibility Through Investment.

To see the level of US aid going to Israel (a bit dated), problems with Oslo and more, check out http://www.sustaincampaign.org/presentations_resources/pres_res_handouts.html

BeliefNet offered a good article on "Mainline Churches vs. Israel?"

It should be noted that the General Assembly action came partly in response to pleas from Palestinian Christians that we do more than issue another statement. Our action was initiated through a resolution from the Presbytery of St. Augustine – not from any office in Louisville, but from Presbyterians who had been to the Middle East many times. In the words of one commissioner, "We were faithful at GA (not in all ways), [and] in the words of Brief Statement of Faith, 'In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage ... to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.'"

Presbyterians for Renewal has posted a lengthy discussion of the divestment question, largely critical of it, but listing a wide variety of resources on both sides, including statements by two evangelical pastors who favor divestment. http://www.pfrenwal.org/proclamations.asp?q_areaid=13



The Conservative Evangelical Vote, November 2, 2004

The Rev. Arch B. Taylor, Jr.

The author is a retired Presbyterian minister who served for most of his career as a mission worker in Japan, primarily in the field of education.

As a liberal Christian, I am compelled to reflect on the recent presidential election, in which evangelical Christians provided the decisive margin of victory for President George W. Bush and other Republican candidates nationwide. By general consensus, the party's announced opposition to granting equal rights to same sex couples to marry, and local initiatives to legalize such opposition in eleven states, seem to have attracted enough voters to compensate for the fact that a majority of citizens think that both the war in Iraq and the national economy are going badly. In this election, more than in any of recent history, putative "religious values" played a major role. Other "values" include opposition to abortion and stem cell research, also agreeing with the president's stand. In my view, there is a lengthy historical background leading to the Republican win, which uniquely combines American cultural and religious characteristics. I am an ordained minister, honorably retired, of the Presbyterian Church (USA), teacher of Bible as a missionary in Japan, currently a member of the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky, but I offer only my personal views.

Fundamentalists and evangelicals

Present day evangelicals have now rejected their earlier designation "fundamentalists" because of negative reactions to the latter term. "Fundamentalist" has come to designate extreme right wing movements that tend to take an absolutist stand on certain principles for which they are willing to engage in violent conflict. The change of name to evangelical cannot disguise the fact that many hard-line evangelicals really are fundamentalists in the original sense. They stand in direct line of development from the earlier American fundamentalists of about a century ago. Reacting against enlightened views including the theory of evolution and the historical-critical study of the Bible, the founders of the movement presented their views in a series of books called *The Fundamentals*, from which their name was derived. Among the fundamental principles were (1) belief in the Bible as infallibly revealed by God, to be literally interpreted as authoritative in all matters, including historical facts and natural history; (2) the deity of Christ, (3) that all humans are guilty not only of their own sins but also the original sin of Adam and Eve, and therefore deserve God's punishment of eternal death; (4) that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, offered himself to pay the price of sin for all and died in our place—the doctrine of "substitutionary atonement;" (5) that Jesus rose bodily from the tomb in the resurrection; (6) that Jesus will return to judge all people and establish God's kingdom.

These principles had pretty much characterized Protestant Christianity in the US since the earliest times, but were being challenged by attempts to reinterpret the Christian message in the light of growing scientific, historical, and cultural knowledge. Thus, the Fundamentals and resulting fundamentalism represented a reactionary holding action. During the decades that followed, the mainline churches tried to adapt to the new knowledge and began to teach it in their seminaries and theological faculties. Many pastors, once out of seminary, hesitated to challenge their parishioners' traditional beliefs. If they did, they might lose members to more conservative congregations or denominations. Churches that moved away from almost exclusive emphasis on individual salvation to include serious attempts to implement the social and economic aspects of biblical teaching and willingness to dialogue with other religions continued to lose membership. In the USA, a rapidly growing number of non-denominational churches sprang up, for the most part combining the faith of The Fundamentals and Dispensationalism (see below). Along with growth in numbers and influence, they have become more aggressive and absolutist. They tend to neglect the socio-economic aspects of biblical religion and concentrate on "soul winning" both locally and globally. They insist Christianity is the only true religion and without personal faith in Jesus Christ nobody can be saved. Conservative church membership grows while the old mainline churches have lost numbers and influence and are sometimes referred to as "sideline." Many of their members have also tended to vote Republican, being still attached to the traditional faith and affluent enough to be swayed by economic and social factors that appeal to self-interest.

The mutual influence of conservative evangelicalism and American culture

In my view, there are many aspects of conservative evangelical religion and American culture that are mutually supportive. Although there are positive aspects to this mutual relationship, increasing emphasis on serious negative aspects does not bode well for our nation and our world.

The appeal to self-interest

When we consider traditional Christian belief as propagated in our country, we recognize that it has always had an element of appeal to self-interest. People believe the Bible's purpose is to teach the "way of salvation," to answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Evangelicals give a stock answer: We are all sinners, deserving of God's punishment in hell. But Jesus died in our place, and if we accept Jesus as our Savior, we will spend eternity in heaven, not hell. This is a powerful incentive for many people, especially if they are undergoing a particularly stressful life experience. There is no denying that many people have had their lives literally turned around for the better in response to this appeal and "get saved" as many evangelicals express it. Once saved, believers get baptized, affiliate with a congregation, attend worship two or three times a week, contribute generously, and

engage in efforts to win others and to help fellow church members in need. These are all praiseworthy endeavors, but evangelicals tend not to favor government programs of welfare or efforts of denominations to influence tax-supported social and economic policies for that purpose. They resonate positively to the mantra pronounced by President Ronald Reagan and continually repeated by Republicans: the government is the problem, not the solution.

Extreme emphasis on individual responsibility

When evangelicals make their appeal to a person to get saved they emphasize the importance of the individual's own decision. A typical leaflet distributed by members of a fundamentalist Baptist church outlines "God's Simple Plan of Salvation" and insists: **"Your joy or your sorrow for all eternity depends upon your answer. ... Let God save you this very moment"** (emphasis in original). What this really means is, it's all up to you. God loves you so much he gave his son; Jesus loves you so much he died for you, but it's all for nothing unless you act. If you go to heaven, it's because you accepted God's offer. If you end up in hell it's because you refused. No matter what God and Jesus have done, it's all up to you.

The typical American ideal of rugged individualism complements the evangelicals' emphasis on personal responsibility, with the result that they respond positively to proposals to dismantle the social assistance programs begun by Roosevelt's New Deal and expanded after World War II. Evangelicals criticize "social engineers" who they say ignore individual responsibility and blame all wrongdoing on circumstances beyond a person's control. "Get tough on crime" policies attract their support, and evangelicals in general seem indifferent to the growing prison population, the privatization of prison management by for-profit companies, and the reduction of educational and rehabilitation programs for prisoners.

With regard to the question of sexual orientation, evangelicals insist that this is a matter of personal choice of life style and condemn it outright. They cite a few biblical texts condemning homosexual behavior without due consideration of the historical and cultural circumstances in which the original texts were written. They cling to their view despite a growing body of scientific information to the contrary and the personal testimony of homosexual persons that their sexual orientation is simply something they had no choice in, something they just discovered about themselves, often at a very early age, and sometimes with devastating results. Evangelicals' indifferent response to HIV/AIDS was the simple declaration that it was nothing more than deserved punishment for gay men's sinful homosexual behavior. They continue to insist that persons of homosexual orientation pose a threat to traditional marriage and family values.

Unquestionably the stability of families is crucial for the general welfare of our nation's population, but evangelicals take a lenient view on the problem of high divorce rates, including the statistic that the highest percentage of divorces occur among self-

designated "born again" Christians. Evangelicals rightly emphasize that sexual abstinence by unmarried persons and fidelity within marriage are the most assured ways to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, yet their general and specific attitudes toward homosexual persons denies to them the legally guaranteed support of society in establishing loving, faithful one-on-one relationships by marriage.

Resort to virtuous violence

Nothing is more American than the belief that in order to overcome evil, good has to be so much stronger that it can defeat evil. The classic Western drama that ensues when the bad guys take over the town and terrorize the people, eventually to be blown away by the good guys, is played out in our society at every level, from the personal to the international. The earliest colonists took it upon themselves to rid the land of the savage Indians and to conquer the threatening wilderness. In our national mythology, America goes to war only in a virtuous cause when forced by threats or attacks by nations or people with evil intentions toward us. Given that evangelicals rate Christianity as the only true religion, a war waged against primarily Muslim enemies can easily slip into a crusade.

The myth of virtuous violence is typical of American culture, but evangelicals promote it enthusiastically with biblical underpinning. Their God is the God of justice, who wreaks vengeance on sinners, and who will by no means clear the guilty. Though patient and long suffering, eventually God exerts his irresistible power to crush the wicked as they so fully deserve. Though God's justice is the primary aspect of the divine character, it is tempered by mercy, so that instead of destroying the whole sinful human race, God laid the punishment for sin upon the sinless Son, Jesus, thus making it possible for all who accept the offer of forgiveness to get saved and escape their deserved penalty. Virtuous violence is thus an essential element in the godhead.

Since a traditional, uncritical reading of the Bible reveals a God depicted almost exclusively in masculine terms, and the universally patriarchal culture of the ancient Near East colored the writing of the Bible, evangelicals actively promote male domination and female subordination. At the farther right wing of the movement, evangelicals tend to advocate corporal punishment for children and tolerate spousal abuse by the husband, whom they exhort to exercise his authority as head of the household.

Virtuous violence plays a role in evangelicals' understanding of the natural world. Rejecting the hypothesis of evolution, they insist on the literal creation of all things out of nothing by God who is "up there" or "out there." Like a potter, imposing shape and form on an inert lump of clay, God made human beings and animals out of the ground. Being created in the image of God seems to mean, for evangelicals, that humankind is somehow separate from the rest of creation. They take the command to subdue the earth as a mandate to exploit and control the earth and its natural resources for human use, often in a very violent

manner. Evangelicals usually promote free market capitalism in opposition to any level of state planning. Everything in all creation, including human lives, has become commodified, without serious objection by many conservatives.

Dualism

The division of all humankind into the “saved” and the “lost” affects the behavior of evangelicals in practically all circumstances, from the most personal level to the global. Strict evangelicals reject the salvation not only of people of other religions, but also of other Christians who do not agree totally with their doctrines and practices. Their congregations keep close fellowship, but they choose their friends, and to whatever extent possible their business associates, from among “the saved.” Mainline church members as well as Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and all the rest fall into their category of the unsaved. For them dualism extends to the division of heaven from earth. In one sense, God and Jesus are not really present in the world, except in the spiritual sense of being in the heart of each believer and the body of the true church. To all the rest, God is “outside,” but from time to time invades the world to intervene in miraculous ways on behalf of true believers or to punish unbelievers. A strong sense of dualism of earthly present and heavenly future permeates evangelical thinking. Those who are really saved can anticipate eternity with God, so that what happens here and now, however important it may seem, is of less concern.

The additional factor of Dispensationalism

During the time of the debate over The Fundamentals, another movement called Dispensationalism was introduced from England. Based on a literal interpretation of Scripture, Dispensationalism divides world history into seven “dispensations,” during each of which God’s plan of salvation changed. God chose the Jews to be his people and to constitute the Kingdom of God, based on God’s theocratic rule based on the Mosaic Law. Jesus came to be the King in God’s Kingdom here on earth, but the Jews rejected him. Temporarily God has put the Kingdom plan on hold and, as a sort of second thought, established the Church as a spiritual entity, completely separate from the Kingdom. Non-Jews, or Gentiles (and also Jews who accept Christ), can get saved by faith in Jesus without becoming Jews and taking on the obligations of obeying the Mosaic Law. Some day Jesus will return to bring in the Kingdom on earth for the Jews. Before that happens, true members of the Church, the spiritual entity, will be snatched up to be with God in heaven, while a Great Tribulation ensues on earth below when Jesus judges and condemns all unbelievers. A climax will come with the final Battle of Armageddon, when all God’s enemies are destroyed, and then Jesus establishes his one-thousand-year Kingdom, ruling from Jerusalem.

John Darby in England developed the dispensational scheme, but it achieved great popularity in the US through the Scofield Reference Bible, which included explanatory notes and cross references in a special edition of the King James Version. Darby

insisted that every divine promise made in the Old Testament must someday be literally fulfilled. He concentrated on the promises of “the Day of the Lord” and the return of the Jews to their homeland in preparation for establishment of the millennial kingdom preceded by the Great Tribulation. Until Darby, almost everyone agreed that believers would suffer in the tribulation but would be saved through it. Darby promulgated the “pre-tribulation rapture” doctrine, which he claimed to have received by special revelation from God, namely, that true believers will be taken up before the tribulation and be spared the agony. This “new” doctrine offers one more appeal to human self-interest.

When I was a child in the 1920s Dispensationalism was popular in the church to which my parents belonged, as well as in other Presbyterian congregations. As a result of church divisions because of Dispensationalism, the Presbyterian Church (US) — the “Southern” church — appointed a committee to study the matter. They concluded that Dispensationalism was based on principles of biblical interpretation contrary to our Reformed tradition and general Christian biblical teaching. Eventually the dispensational sympathizers either gave up their views, as did my parents, or left the Presbyterian church altogether. I believe some other denominations may have gone through a similar process.

Dispensationalism was not originally included in The Fundamentals, but throughout the twentieth century in the US it has become an integral and very powerful factor in evangelical faith and action. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1945 and especially the Israeli victory in the 1967 war that gave them control of Jerusalem, have spurred dispensationalists’ hopes to fever pitch. The time is at hand when it will be possible to build the temple in Jerusalem (after destroying the Muslim shrines there) and restore tribal Israel as foretold in Ezekiel 40-48. Then the Lord can come suddenly to his temple as prophesied in Malachi 3. Most evangelicals support Israel totally and uncritically. Any amount of violence in the cause of hastening the return of Christ is eminently virtuous. The success of the “Left Behind” series of books — presenting a novelistic account of what might happen at the end of the world according to Dispensationalism’s literal interpretation of the Bible — has influenced the thinking of many Americans and their response to the appeals of the Republican leadership. When President Bush expressed mild criticism of Prime Minister Sharon of Israel, evangelicals mobilized 100,000 messages of protest.

Non-Christians and non-evangelicals in the USA have little or no knowledge of Dispensationalism and its dangers, but I wish to mention only a few particular points:

Defective doctrine of the church

Dispensationalism makes an absolute distinction between the Christian church and the Kingdom of God. They consider God’s original purpose was an earthly kingdom centering on the Jews. When the Jews rejected Jesus as king, God put the kingdom plan on hold. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is Jesus’ charter for the kingdom, but it has no immediate claim on the

church. To pray “Thy kingdom come” is to ask God to send Jesus back to earth for the final round of judgment and establishment of the kingdom. Until relatively recently, strict dispensational doctrine insisted that as a spiritual entity, the church has no business trying to influence governmental policies related to social and economic issues.

Defective Christology

In traditional Christian doctrine, Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, fully God as well as fully human. Evangelicals love to declare, “Jesus is God.” For many of them, this means that Jesus takes over all the qualities and powers of God described in the whole Bible. Jerry Falwell was debating the question of homosexuality on TV when a participant remarked that nowhere had Jesus ever taken a stand against homosexuality. Falwell strongly demurred. All Scripture is inspired of God. Jesus is God. Therefore Jesus is the author of the Bible verses condemning homosexuality, he insisted. For liberal Christians, belief in the deity of Christ means that Jesus has revealed God to us in ways hitherto known only imperfectly. Truly to know God is to know Jesus, born in a stable, not a palace, a poor man who lived among and ministered primarily to the poor, who challenged the religious and political power structure of his day, who refused the crowd’s attempt to take him by force and make him king (John 6.15), and who was put to death for teaching and manner of life that challenged the power structure. Jesus reveals to us most clearly the merciful character of God in the Old Testament: God clothed the naked, guilty first couple (Genesis 3.21). God protected the first murderer from revenge (Genesis 4.13-15). God swore never to destroy the earth again for human wrongdoing, because the punishment of the flood had not succeeded in changing the heart’s inclination toward evil (Genesis 6.5-7 & 8.21). Punishment did not compel Israel to return to their God, so God undertook to speak tenderly to them (Hosea 2.13-20) and declared, “I will forgive them freely” (Hosea 14.4) Not only in these texts but all through the Old Testament, God’s mercy and grace far outpace judgment and punishment. This is the God Jesus reveals, but in evangelicalism this characteristic is always subordinated to God’s demand for justice. Thus, as a corollary to defective Christology, we see the defect in the total conception of the person and character of God.

Virtuous violence to the ultimate degree

Evangelicalism, especially as expressed in dispensationalist terms, would have Jesus act for a God who demands the last ounce of flesh and last drop of blood of the unrepentant sinner. At his first coming, Jesus offered himself as the Lamb of God, the sinless sacrifice for the sins of the world, and believers in his name get saved. But if people reject this salvation, they become objects of divine wrath when Jesus comes again. Toward them Jesus will turn into the avenging Lion of the Tribe of Judah. In the Left Behind series of novels, with a mere wave of the hand Jesus inflicts the most horrible flesh devouring plagues on unbelievers. Jesus confronts the Antichrist with the sentence: “Death is too good for you; you shall suffer in the lake of fire for all eternity.”

Conclusion

The Republican party leaders and President Bush in particular appeal to other items on the agenda of the right-wing conservative Christians: mistrust and outright opposition to the United Nations, support for the death penalty, opposition to limitations on individuals’ right to bear arms, exploitation of natural resources, and in many locales racist attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics.

It would require a whole book written by a sociologist of religion to expatiate on the degree to which evangelical Christian faith and practice have shaped the American culture, and the extent to which American culture nourishes evangelical Christianity. One may suggest that in certain areas they simply coalesce, and therefore when people of other nations and other religious faiths refer to America as a Christian nation, they are not so far off the mark despite our denials. I have no doubt that Bush’s pandering to the special interests of his right wing Christian constituency made the difference between victory and defeat in the November 2, 2004 national elections. From the publication of *The Fundamentals* and the Scofield Reference Bible, nearly a century has passed, and the conservative Christian right has gradually built up its power and influence to this point. We should not wait for the inevitable fate of arrogant religio-political imperialism to overtake the Republicans and all the rest of us. Nearly half of those who voted (and I suspect a good many who abstained out of disgust for the whole thing) strongly believe that there are other ways of being patriotic Americans and of being Christians than what evangelical Dispensationalists claim. We liberal and progressive people of various persuasions must rally our forces to offer a more attractive vision for the nation and the world than we have done so far.

Author’s note:

Feel free to quote and share this material; I ask only that you give credit and notify me of your having done so. I invite comment and criticism addressed to me personally.

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Dr. Taylor adds this personal note:

One critic cautioned me about trying to explain the beliefs of people with whom I disagree, but I responded that at one time I pretty much agreed with them. I was brought up on the Scofield Bible at home in early life, and I have kept up with Dispensationalism since then. In my personal faith journey, I started out pretty much on the fundamentalist/evangelical path. I have close relations with people who are fundamentalists, and I have listened to fundamentalist preachers. If I have misrepresented them in any way, I welcome correction.



The “Social Creed” of the Churches

What does it mean 100 years later?

The 216th General Assembly called for conversations and studies to commemorate the centennial of the 1908 Social Creed of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. That statement engaged churches in advocating for reforms such as an end to child labor, the six-day week, occupational safety, a living wage, and other steps aimed at moving American society closer to what a “Christ-like God” was believed to want for all Americans. The Summer 2004 issue of *Network News* carried articles by Gene TeSelle and Chris Iosso on the Social Creed. Gene TeSelle offers some additional thoughts in light of the 2004 presidential election.

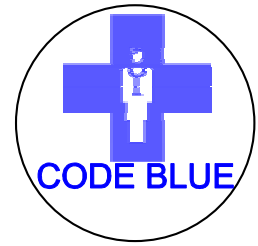
As we approach the hundredth anniversary, we cannot help noting the similarities to our own time. Inequalities of income and wealth in the U.S. are now greater than they have been since the “Gilded Age” of the late nineteenth century. Many of the principles enunciated in the Social Creed and in the general mood of the Progressive Era, such as a “living wage” sufficient to support a family, are regarded as absurd and unfeasible by many shapers of public opinion today.

The problems addressed by the Social Creed were national in scope; indeed, it was because these problems could not be addressed adequately at the local or state level that new kinds of federal legislation were advocated and eventually adopted. In our own day we see a similar broadening of scope as the much-celebrated globalization of the economy brings all the workers of the world into competition with each other.

In this situation corporations have greater power than many national governments, and a new generation of trade agreements (NAFTA, the World Trade Organization, CAFTA) gives corporations new rights to challenge local, state, and national laws or regulations. The right of labor to organize and bargain is often challenged by law or by private violence. Protection of the workplace and the environment against hazardous conditions is all too frequently ineffectual or nonexistent. Non-governmental organizations have urged corporations and entire industries to adopt “codes of conduct,” but monitoring and enforcement have been difficult to achieve.

As we approach the hundredth anniversary of the Social Creed, then, we must ask not only what in it is to be reaffirmed but how it ought to be strengthened to meet new challenges in national and global economies.

Code Blue – a national campaign to bring focus to the health care crisis in America.



The Peace committee of Wabash Valley Presbytery has made a proposal for a national campaign to reduce the cost of health care.

Their statement says: “We believe our national health care system is in a state of crisis. To call attention to that national emergency, we are asking that “*we the people*” of America begin wearing “*Code Blue*” buttons on our lapels. This is a call for: (1) public awareness of the issue, (2) increased legislator awareness of the need for health care cost reform, and (3) help in repairing our unhealthy health care system.”

Code Blue is intended to be a non-partisan response to a crisis in our nation. It had its inception from conversations at First Presbyterian Church of Rochester, Indiana, and was developed through the Peace Committee of the Presbytery of Wabash Valley and has received the approval and blessing of the Presbytery of Wabash Valley for networking wherever possible.

If you're interested in joining, contact:
 Reverend Ben Whitfield
 530 Jefferson St.
 Rochester, IN 46975
 574-223-5919
 codeblue_1@hotmail.com

Continued from Gordon Shull, page 23

God in Christ. Some Presbyterians in high places, apparently without reading the speech itself, gasped at the colloquial words and condemned both speech and speaker out of hand. Have we suffered another knee-jerk reaction in this case? We can only decide after we have considered carefully the questions posed above. Fairness, our own integrity, and our peace of mind demand no less.

The Silence of the Churches

From the Shower of Stoles Project
Martha G. Juillerat, National Program Director

The Shower of Stoles is a collection of over a thousand liturgical stoles from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons from twenty-four denominations in six countries. Each stole contains the story of a LGBT person who is active in the life and leadership of their faith community in some way: minister, elder, deacon, teacher, missionary, musician, administrator or active layperson. This extraordinary collection celebrates the gifts of LGBT persons who serve God in countless ways, while also lifting up those who have been excluded from service because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The Shower of Stoles Project began in the Presbyterian Church in 1995; Presbyterians continue to represent the largest number of stoles in the collection. The Project is a partner with More Light Presbyterians as we work together to build a more inclusive church.

The Shower of Stoles Project is a member of the Welcoming Congregation Programs, a network of groups, including More Light Presbyterians, that work through local congregations to help make the church a welcoming place for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. There was a feeling expressed last week among a number of us in the Welcoming Congregations movement that on election night our jobs just became harder. There are two reasons for this: first, the political climate that was ushered in with this election, and second, the perceived silence of the mainline churches.

This fall, for the first time in nearly half a century, a major national political party succeeded in making discrimination against an entire class of people a centerpiece of its campaign. This effort to marginalize lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons was fueled entirely by the so-called religious right; not one single respected scientific or medical group in the nation lent credence to these efforts or to the rationale behind them. The fruits of their success quickly became evident: within hours of John Kerry's concession speech the internet was full of vitriol aimed at LGBT persons and the progressive organizations that support us. The "moral values mandate" extends, it seems, even to hate groups. It is chilling to think that some of these newly-emboldened groups now feel

they have, in the words of one of my colleagues, "permission to come after us again."

Equally troublesome, though, has been the failure of the mainline churches to challenge the reduction of moral values to a couple of personal piety issues. Many individual church leaders did work extraordinarily hard throughout the election season attempting to reframe the "values" talk to include such things as poverty, homelessness, health care and the environment. Several groups of individuals came together to publish open letters on these issues, raising tens of thousands of dollars for full-page ads in the *New York Times*. Inevitably, though, the lists of signatures in these ads were followed by disclaimers noting that the opinions expressed therein were those of the individuals alone, and were not reflective of the institutions with which they identified.

In the end, the General Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has remained conspicuously absent from this public debate. It is therefore incumbent upon the Witherspoon Society, the Shower of Stoles Project, More Light Presbyterians, and other progressive groups within the PC (USA) to reclaim the example of Jesus Christ, whose constant concern was for the poor and disenfranchised. Most important in this political climate, we must redouble our efforts to end discrimination against



Martha Juillerat

LGBT people, and to build a church that is as loving and welcoming as God is.

Find your voice, and help us break the silence. Consider having a display of the Shower of Stoles in your church this winter. We can work with you to tailor a program of witness and education that will help start the conversation in your congregation. E-mail us with your ideas and questions at our **new e-mail address:** stolesproject@earthlink.net, or visit our website at www.showerofstoles.org.

To receive regular e-mail notes of additions to the Witherspoon website, just send a note to

douging2@aol.com

Please put "web updates" in the subject line.

Announcement from Covenant
Network

**Covenant Network offers
new documentary:
*Turning Points:
Stories of Life and
Change in the Church***

Turning Points: Stories of Life and Change in the Church is a documentary about Presbyterians struggling with the denomination's current ordination standards. This hour-long, four-part story with a study guide is suitable for use in adult education classes, pre-presbytery workshops, session meetings — wherever the church gathers for study and discernment of God's call to the church today.

Each section focuses on a particular story and is surrounded by thoughtful, Reformed theological comment. Groups may choose to view the whole video at once or choose which segments are most useful for their needs. Biblical scholars and theologians including Walter Brueggemann and Beverly Gaventa provide commentary and interpretation.

This video was designed to be viewed by those who are still trying to discern the role God calls those who are Christian and gay or lesbian to take in Christ's church. Christians of all theological viewpoints are invited to watch and discuss this thought-provoking documentary together.

For more information and an order form, go to
<http://www.covenantnetwork.org/TurningPoints/tpweb.pdf>

**Ghost Ranch Seminar — July 25-31
PATHS TO A JUST AND PEACEFUL WORLD**

In partnership with The Witherspoon Society,
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation

National and global events seem to be spiraling out of control, whether it is U.S. militarism/imperialism, the earth's environment, massive hunger and disease, millions of refugees and immigrants looking for survival, or the growing chasm between the rich and poor. The groups sponsoring the seminar feel it is essential that discernment and discussion take place in our congregations about a different future for our planet — concern for the common good of all created life, for just relations between peoples and nations. Should not the church be part of the growing international movement to outlaw war and abolish the development of increasingly lethal weapons? Looking at these issues from a biblical, theological and historical background we will be led by three knowledgeable and experienced presenters. Using Colombia as a case study, we will explore how alternatives to militarism could bring peace and justice to this war-ravaged nation. Our discussions will center on what is necessary to bring the vision of a just and healthy world to fruition?

Leaders will include:

Maria Arroyo de Kemmerle, Area coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean for the Worldwide Ministries Division of the PC(USA). She is responsible for nurturing and developing the PC(USA)'s relationships with Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the region, and she's a resource on the region for other GAC entities, presbyteries, and congregations. Born and raised in Mexico City, she has worked in Nicaragua (1986-87) and Chiapas (1988-89). She was a PC(USA) mission worker in Brazil from 1989 to 1995. She came to live in the U.S. in 1995. Married, she is the mother of two boys. In the Spring of 2004 she accompanied Moderator Susan Andrews to Colombia where they met with Colombian Presbyterians, a community of displaced people, and human rights workers to learn about the 40-year conflict the nation has suffered.

Mark Lewis Taylor, the Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Theology and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ. Among his numerous books is *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross through Lockdown America* (2001). His essays and organizing focus are on U.S. policy in Mesoamerica, political prisoner and criminal justice movements in the U.S., anti-war peace work and prophetic resistance to empire. During 2003-2004, he was Research Fellow at the University of Helsinki Collegium of Advanced Studies, working on a project called "Postcolonial Theory and Liberation Theology." The research and writing for the year are reflected in a book he is now writing, *Prophetic Spirit: Beyond American Empire and Romance*. He has spent time in Guatemala, Chiapas and Haiti.

Anne Llewellyn Barstow, an historian and activist. Arrested at Ft. Benning for protesting its teaching of terrorism to Latin American military, she has made fifteen human rights trips to Latin America, including three to Colombia. A member of the National Committee of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, she has served the national church as a writer on the CONA document on nuclear war and the current Terrorism and Religion statement. She is the editor of *War's Dirty Secret: Rape, Prostitution, and Other Crimes Against Women* (2000). At the SUNY College at Old Westbury she taught Women's Studies and Peace Studies courses. She served on the board of Witness for Peace from 1990-1999, two of those years as chair.

Coordinator: Jane Hanna E-mail: mjhfos@aol.com

Continued from Editor's Spot, page 3

concern, and who don't think they're crazy. (Our congregation outside Minneapolis has had an unusual number of visitors since the election – not just because Christmas is coming, and probably not even for Stewardship Sunday, but because they're looking for a place where they can find friends and shared commitments and values.)

A friend suggested the other day that one important dimension of the Advent experience is awareness of our vulnerability. At this season we see our weakness and the chanciness of our lives reflected in the frailty of an expectant mother and a newborn baby. And this year we're also aware of the vulnerability of our nation, the world of nations, and even the world of nature, to the terrible damage that is being wrought in the name of freedom.

Yet our vulnerability can teach us much, if we're willing to learn. It can help us be more aware of the vulnerability that is a normal part of existence for most people around the world. It can show us that we may have to help heal the world not by using our wealth and power, but by sitting with those who are excluded from wealth and power. Compassion may be a key to open the door into a new way of "doing justice."

I suspect many progressive Christians, following the insights of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism half a century ago, have seen the struggle for justice as a matter of gaining power and using it to change social and political structures. But for now, at least, we no longer have much power to do that, or even to protect some of the good changes that have been made in the past. So what can we do?

Perhaps we need to start with compassion – being open to the

painful realities faced by the victims of our empire, and then seeking ways to challenge the oppression, the violence, and violations that are being done in our name. And out of that human connection with the lives of others – lives so different from our own privileged existence – we may learn to respect those people. Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase never tires of reminding us that many of those folks show dignity and strength, courage and understanding that indeed win our deep respect. When we learn to learn from them, we may be on the path to new ways of seeking justice.

But learning compassion and respect may also lead us into new relations with those whom we tend to view as our opponents – the people we see as the perpetrators and supporters of oppression and injustice. We may learn to see that they too are creatures of God, many of them involved in a system far beyond their comprehension – and seeking to live good lives, find security and happiness and all the rest.

We heard a lot just a few years ago about a "politics of compassion." (Only a few faint rhetorical echoes remain today!) We must not let that word be hijacked as a slogan that conceals reality more than it reveals it. And we must not let the dualistic theology now ascendent in the White House drive us into a dualism from the other side.

This is indeed a time for us to face our vulnerability, even to embrace it. It's a time for us to take the risk of loving those who view us as enemies. It's a time for us to listen to the people we have seen as victims – to let them teach us to view them and all people with respect. Let's be compassionate indeed – but not as those who "have" helping those who "have not." Rather, let's learn respectful compassion, which sees the infinite value in those too often defined as "the poor," and which is willing to learn from them.



Witherspoon's executive committee met in Chicago, Sept. 29 - Oct. 1

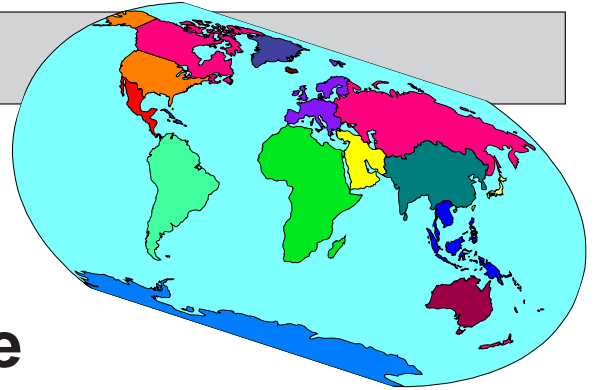
Gathering for its fall business meeting at McCormick Seminary, the Witherspoon board welcomed new members Vanessa Aja-Sigmon and John Harris to this distinguished body.

Main items of business included planning for the conference on global mission and justice (see next page!), rethinking the Witherspoon mission statement adopted last year, making minor changes, and brainstorming about what that statement suggests for future plans and programs.



Among these present (left to right): Vanessa Aja-Sigmon, David Zuverink, Jenny Stone, John Harris, Charles Ryun (representing Stony Point Conference Center), Jake Young, Trina Zelle, and Ken Smith.

WitherspoonNews



SAVE THE DATE

Dancing with God: Global Mission on the Edge

September 9 – 11 (Friday through Sunday), 2005, at Stony Point Center

How does our church's involvement in worldwide mission serve the cause of justice, and help bring peace to the world?

The Witherspoon Society is sponsoring a special mission conference as a gathering for all justice-oriented, mission-minded Presbyterians. Join with emerging church leaders, mission co-workers (including those returning and retired), and young adult volunteers in mission (YAV), along with our global mission partners.

We'll use our time together to:

- share experiences of work in mission, especially in the areas of justice ministry and honoring God's creation,
- explore the connection between PC(USA)'s mission and social justice ministries
- help renew interest in worldwide mission, especially in conjunction with the "Gathering for God's Future" campaign by the Worldwide Ministries Division,
- foster closer networking, connections and partnership with all concerned,
- learn our mission history and theology, and
- seek new ways of doing mission for the 21st century.

Cost (including registration, program, room and board)

If registered by June 1:	\$240	(commuters: \$140)
by August 1:	\$260	(commuters: \$160)
After that:	\$280	(commuters: \$180)

This conference is sponsored for the sake of our whole church by the Witherspoon Society, in cooperation with the Worldwide Ministries Division and Stony Point Center.

Look for more information coming your way.

If you have questions or suggestions for creating this conference, please contact:

Rev. Trina Zelle, the Chair of the Design Team

(602) 264-1221, ext. 108 zellerev@earthlink.net

Rev. Charles Ryu, Program Director at Stony Point Center

(845) 786-5674, ext 111 cryu@stonypointcenter.org

When Presbyterians are in mission,
God's yearning for peace and justice finds willing partners.

If ever there was a time for Witherspoon, and for getting connected ... !

**... and a time to encourage others
to join ...**

One Witherspoon member, rejoining after some years of being inactive, said, "Especially given the election I thought it best to re-connect with my Presbyterian Social Witness roots."

As progressive people of faith look for friends and ideas to help them face the years ahead, the Witherspoon Society can offer both.

Why not invite *your* friends to join this network!!

If you'd like membership brochures or some extra copies of *Network News* to give them, just send a note or give a call to Doug King

Are you missing the Summer '04 issue of Network News?

Apparently some copies of the Summer 2004 issue of *Network News* never got into the mail.

We apologize if your copy
never arrived!

If you'll send word to your Editor,
he'll try to be sure you get one
as soon as possible.

Just send an e-mail to
dougking2@aol.com

or call Doug King at
(952) 473-2711

Your gift will make a difference!

As we face immense challenges in our church and our world, please consider a donation to the Witherspoon Society. As the tax year ends, we hope you can consider a special contribution to support our work throughout the year. We've got a variety of ways you can help make a difference:

- *Direct donations:* Please send to : Witherspoon Society, 1418 Clarendon Drive, Wayzata, MN 55391
- *Endowment:* WS has set up an endowment fund with the Presbyterian Foundation. One option is the charitable gift annuity, which provides lifetime income to you and to Witherspoon.
- *Will:* Do you want to leave something to continue your progressive voice for future generations? You can mention the Witherspoon Society in your will.
- You can add to the Endowment through the Presbyterian Foundation or with a direct contribution earmarked to Witherspoon.

Want more information?

Contact our Treasurer:
David Zuverink
15860 Poppy Lane, Unit 5
Los Gatos, CA 95030
Phone (408) 395-0905
E-mail: zuverink@aol.com

The Society thanks you!

The Next Network News

In this issue we've tried to offer a variety of views on two issues that have dominated the news in our society and in the world for the past months: an election that promises more challenges to what we understand to be authentic peace and justice, and intense reactions to the on-going Israel-Palestine conflict, and specifically to the effort by the 2004 General Assembly to address that conflict.

It's pretty clear that struggles to define the place of "values" in our political life will continue – and we will continue striving to help define in some way what those values *are*.

We hope you'll share your thoughts on both of these issues, as we all think and pray and work together for a world of greater justice and peace.

**Deadline for submissions
is
February 15, 2005**

Please let us hear from you!

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Is it time to renew your membership?

Check the date on your mailing label to know when your membership expires. You can send in your renewal a little early, and avoid our nagging letters!

Just use the return envelope in the center of this newsletter, or contact our Membership Coordinator:

John E. Harris
First Presbyterian Church
77 Boggess Street
Buckhannon, WV 26201
H - 304-473-1929
E-mail: JOHN.HARRIS1@ecunet.org

And if you're all paid up, consider a gift membership for someone who shares your commitment to peace and justice!

To receive regular e-mail notes of additions to the Witherspoon website, just send a note to



dougking2@aol.com

Please put "web updates" in the subject line.

Order extra copies!!

If you find the *News* helpful, others may find it so, too. Order as many as you can use!

For 1 to 5 copies (of the same or different issues) \$2.00 each
For 6 to 10 copies \$1.50 each
For 11 or more copies \$1.25 each

We'll pay the postage unless you want express shipment.
Use this form to order, or call Doug King at (952) 473-2711, fax (952) 473-2716.

Please send me

_____ copies of this issue
_____ copies of the Summer 2004 issue, reporting on the 216th GA
_____ copies of the Spring 2004 issue looking toward the 216th GA
_____ copies of the Winter 2004 issue on the New American Empire
_____ copies of the Winter, 2002 issue, with material from the Stony Point Conference on the Confession of 1967
_____ copies of the special Fall '99 issue on **Working for Economic Justice**

(For other back issues, please call or send a note.)

I would like to recruit new members, so please send:

_____ copies of the Witherspoon Society membership brochure, or
_____ **one copy** of a master sheet so I can make my own copies.
(No charge for these!!)

TOTAL: \$ _____

My check to "Witherspoon Society" is enclosed

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State** _____ **ZIP** _____

Phone: _____

(in case of questions)

Return this form to:
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