

Good talk, good ideas, and hard realities from the 215th General Assembly



The Assembly: events and reports

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The President's Corner

After the Assembly: Keeping perspective on the big issues

by Kent Winters-Hazelton, president

The Anglican Archbishop of South Africa, Njongonkulu Ndungane, recently issued a provocative challenge to the Christians of the industrial world. In a world plagued with life and death issues, such as poverty and the pandemic growth of AIDS in Africa, the Church, the bishop suggests, has become obsessed with sexuality. (*Los Angeles Times*, 7/5/03)

There is no question that the Church today struggles with issues of sexuality. Hardly a day goes by without the news bringing new stories dealing with lesbian and gay Christians struggling for full inclusion in the Church. Within our own denomination, we have learned the sad news of action taken by the Presbytery of Cincinnati to remove the Reverend Steve Van Kuiken from the practice of ordained ministry within the Presbyterian Church. At his trial, Rev. Van Kuiken offered a remarkable defense of his ministry which can be accessed at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/van_kuiken_statement.htm Yet for all the lip-service given to equal standing in the Book of Order (G-5.0202), Steve was stripped of his ordination for treating lesbian and gay members of his congregation no differently from any other member. Meanwhile, the Associated Press has quoted Paul Rolf Jensen as claiming that disciplinary cases will soon be filed against 350 ministers, who, in Jensen's view, have violated church law. "Liberal ministers who defy church law will be kicked out of the pulpit or walk out of their own accord," he said. (*Associated Press*, 7/5/03)

What I find most intriguing about Bishop Ndungane's words is the way they reflect what many witnessed at this summer's General Assembly. If it weren't for two issues, the Des Moines overture and the Families in Transition report, one might have wondered if Presbyterians really gathered at all this year. Issues that in other years attracted significant discussion and disagreement passed without comment. This was particularly true of issues that are at the heart of Witherspoon's passion for peacemaking and social justice issues. Remember the time when peacemaking was controversial? This year the Peacemaking committee was one of the first to complete its work and report to the plenary. Its work generated very little controversy. Among its actions were expressions of concern about the ongoing war in Iraq. Yet when that item came to the floor of the Assembly there were no comments, questions or debate. There was a war and Presbyterians did not want to say anything about it? The same pattern held for International Issues.

Of course, when the Assembly did begin to debate issues of sexuality the lines at the microphones grew long. By now, you know the outcome of the votes, the disappointment of many lesbian and gay



Kent Winters-Hazelton

members of our church and their families, supporters and allies, and the discouragement for short term change in our denominations. (See pages 14-16.) But while we struggle with another setback this year, we can hope that other issues of great importance to the lives of millions of God's children will not be ignored. May we continue to grapple with the challenge posed by the whole Gospel.

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The Editor's Spot

The *Layman* says we're a "special interest group" – so what should be our interests?

A few weeks ago *The Layman Online* did us the honor of labeling the Witherspoon Society as a "special-interest group." We were cited especially for having "vilified" the Presbytery of San Diego – or at least its adoption of "Essential Tenets and Reformed Distinctives" for use in directing the preparation and examination of candidates for ministry.

We're in good company, though. Former Moderator Herbert Valentine sent an e-mail note adding his critical views of the San Diego effort to enforce a new orthodoxy, and we posted it along with a through commentary by Witherspoon Issues Analyst Gene TeSelle.

You can read TeSelle's comments on pages 19-22 of this issue of *Network News*, and the *Layman's* comments at <http://www.layman.org/layman/news/2003-news-articles/special-interest-group.htm>. You'll find more responses on our own website, at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/more_on_san_diego_guidelines.htm

First I was bemused at being accused of vilification by real experts, but that led me

to think about what it means to be a "special-interest group." That term is used in church politics, and in secular politics, as a condemnation (a vilification, perhaps?) – and for good reason. To be involved in a political process working only for one's own limited interests is to ignore the wider needs of the whole group. The examples that come to mind are overwhelming: the giant corporations that manipulate the U.S. government – even into war – for their own profits; church organizations whose primary commitment is not to the church, but to their own vision of a purer, more righteous church in accordance with their own narrow definitions. (See for instance that document from San Diego.)

So what about Witherspoon; are we just another special interest group? Well, yes, there's truth in that. We too play a role in the political processes of our Presbyterian Church. Our efforts reflect our own particular commitments to the church's mission to seek justice, and build peace, and move our church toward a more open and inclusive way of being the church. And indeed, we're sometimes in danger of forgetting other aspects of the church's life and mission in the world. But we try to remember that we are not the whole church, and we don't have the whole truth. We have our vocation, if you will, within the wider mission of the

church. And we try to fulfill that mission as faithfully – and as creatively, and courageously (for it does take a bit of courage these days!) – as we can.

So what are *your* special interests?

But speaking of special interests, and of a defined mission within our church, I'd like to invite you, our members, to ponder a question: What should be the particular focus (or foci, if you don't want to be *too* narrow!) of our mission in these difficult days? Our Executive Committee will be meeting in September for three days of visioning and planning. It would help us greatly to hear from you about things to which we should pay attention: issues, theological ideas, ways of working both locally and nationally, projects – what can *you* suggest as we plan for the coming year, and the years beyond?

Please let us hear from you!

Doug King

Just send an e-mail note to douging2@aol.com, or a letter to Doug King, 1418 Clarendon Drive, Wayzata, MN 55391. I promise I'll pass everything along to the whole group as soon as I can!

The Witherspoon Society Mission

We are a society of justice-seeking Presbyterians, responding to the God who calls us through the power of the Holy Spirit into wholeness, as a community that lives out the radical vision of the Gospel of Jesus the Christ in a world increasingly broken.

We profess our mission to be:

- nurturing the prophetic voice of the church through study, action and reflection,
- equipping faithful Presbyterians for responsible participation at all levels of the church,
- advocating for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and the full inclusion of all God's people in church and society.

Through our witness we seek to revitalize the church's life and focus, so that it may be biblically and confessionally faithful in the world.

A Bent Towards Love

Dirk Ficca

Executive Director, Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions
Witherspoon Society Annual Luncheon
215th General Assembly
Denver, Colorado
May 25, 2003

Dr. Dirk Ficca is the Executive Director of the Parliament of World's Religions, based in Chicago, Illinois. A Presbyterian minister, he drew considerable attention (if that's the word for it) a few years ago for his address at a Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference. The Witherspoon Society was happy to welcome him as our keynote speaker for the annual Witherspoon Luncheon.

In February 1943, Langdon Gilkey was a young American teacher at Yenching University near Peking, when word came that the Japanese military was rounding up all foreigners into a civilian internment camp in northern China. For the next two and a half years, two thousand people occupied a former foreign mission compound in the Shantung province. Businessmen and academics, career civil servants and lawyers, doctors and junkies, Protestant missionaries and Roman Catholic priests, monks and nuns, the young and the old, mostly from American and Europe, all crammed together in a set of dull gray institutional buildings stretching a city block. With machine gun toting Japanese guards patrolling on six-foot high walls, this cross-section of humanity became a living laboratory of what it means to live together, an experiment in civilization.

In the early weeks, a governance structure was established with working committees to oversee camp life. Gilkey was originally appointed to the Quarters Committee. Families of four or more were assigned to a 9' by 12' room. Single men and women crowded into bunkrooms with only a cot and footlocker to oneself. Kitchens were set up to provide three meals a day on limited rations of cereal, flour, meat and vegetables. A makeshift hospital was established. Slowly the camp was transformed into a miniature society. Salesmen became bricklayers. Executives became cooks. Socialites were assigned latrine duty. "Everyone was entitled to the same basic rations and the same amount of living space. And above all, everyone was required to do the same sort of work, according to his (or her) physical abilities."¹

And as time moved on, as the camp felt at least one step away from the brink of survival, a strange new sense of "normalcy" developed. A black market surfaced, peddling eggs, fruit, jam, and chocolate. Romances blossomed. A baseball league was formed. Three act comic revues on camp life gave way to full-blown productions of Coward, Barrie and Shaw and performances of Handel's *Messiah* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. All of this in the

midst of the daily social and moral crises of living together, with endless battles under the ethical guise of fairness and decency over food, space, comfort, and privacy.



Dirk Ficca

As time went on, the supply of food began to dwindle. Bread was rationed to six slices a day; a bowl of stew for lunch, a cup of thin soup for dinner. Gilkey dropped from 170 pounds to just 125. However, in July of 1944, two hundred Red Cross parcels arrived, with a cover letter addressed to the two hundred Americans in camp. Gilkey described this treasure trove and what it meant:

Each parcel had four sections. Each section contained a pound of powdered milk, four packs of cigarettes, four tins of butter, three of Spam or Prem, one pound of cheese, chocolate, sugar, and odd cans of powdered coffee, jams, salmon, liver pate, and a one-pound package of dried prunes or raisins. After a diet made up largely of bread, low on meats and oils, and lacking in sweets of all sorts – in fact, without real taste – fifty pounds of this sort of rich, fat-laden and tasteful food was manna from heaven...as my friends and I found out, if a hungry man disciplined himself and ate only a little each day, his parcel could be stretched to supplement the daily diet for almost four months and keep its owner from being really hungry.²

And furthermore, given the fact that... "without exception Americans were most generous about giving their non-American friends food from their parcels, made the whole affair the source of a good deal of international good will..."³

Of course, after several months, these parcels had run out and food supplies were lower than ever. A sense of gloom gripped the camp. Then, unexpectedly, one January day, the front gates of the compound swung open, and in came a seemingly endless stream of Red Cross parcels, loaded on donkey carts. Clearly marked from the American Red Cross, there was however no cover letter designating their recipients. By count there were 1,550 parcels, with now 1,450 persons in camp, 200 of them Americans. "That means seven or eight parcels for each American," someone yelled, a pronouncement that was met with frowns and anger from the

other nationals.

Two days later, the Japanese authorities announced that parcels were to be distributed the next day, with each American receiving one and a half parcels, and everyone else one parcel, an ingenious stroke of diplomacy that seemed to satisfy everyone. But the next morning at 10 AM, as everyone lined up to receive their bounty, they were confronted with a statement, tersely written, that due to protests from the American community, the parcels would not be distributed. Seven Americans had demanded of the Japanese commandant the proper documentation for such a distribution plan. Given the customary military inflexibility of the Japanese, the commandant referred the matter to Tokyo.

In the interim, all hell broke loose in camp. Hostility, jealousy and national pride boiled to the surface. Those who had been friends and neighbors for a year and a half did not speak to each other. Fights broke out. "A community where everyone had long forgotten whether a man was American or British, white, Negro, Jew, Parsee or Indian, had suddenly disintegrated into a brawling, bitterly divided collection of hostile national groups. Ironically, our wondrous Christmas gift had brought in its wake the exact opposite of peace on earth."⁴

At that moment, humiliated to be associated with being an American, Gilkey and some of his friends decided to poll the American camp about the situation. They spoke with a number of people believed to fairly representative of prevalent attitudes.

The first person Gilkey approached was blunt: "These parcels are mine because I'm an American, and I'm going to see I get every last one that's coming to me. I'm sorry for these other guys, sure – but this stuff is ours. Why don't their own governments take care of *them*? No lousy foreigner is going to get what belongs to me!"⁵

The second person argued from a legal perspective: "Don't misunderstand me. I'm not worried about the parcels – about how many I or the other Americans get. I couldn't care less. With me it's the legal principle that counts. This is American property – simple, isn't it? You can't question that! You see, this property can only be administered by Americans and not by the enemy. We've got to make sure in this hellhole, whatever price we have to pay in popularity, that the rights of American property are preserved and respected. Come to think of it, we've also got to be faithful executors to the American Red Cross donors who sent these here for our use. But mind you, I speak as a professional lawyer. For myself, I don't really care how many parcels I get."⁶

The third person, an American missionary with a Chinese wife and four children, argued from a moral point of view: "You understand, of course, that I am not at all interested personally in the parcels, even for my family. I only want to be sure that there be a moral quality to the use we make of these fine American goods. Now as you are well aware, Gilkey, there is no virtue whatever in being *forced* to share. We Americans should be given the parcels, all right. Then each of us should be left to exercise his own moral judgment in deciding what to do with them. We will share, but not

on order from the enemy, for then it would not be moral... If the Japanese share it *for* us, no one is doing a good act, and so there's not morality in it anywhere."⁷

Several days later, the word of arbitration came from Tokyo. Each person in camp was to get one parcel. The additional one hundred parcels would be sent to another camp.

It was the rationales for not sharing their American Red Cross parcels that have stuck with me since I first read this account over ten years ago. I was also struck by Gilkey's reflections on them, giving a fresh understanding to the age-old moral dilemma:

...a man's (person's) moral health or unhealth depends primarily on the fundamental character, direction, and loyalty of his (or her) self as a whole; of the "bent," so to speak, of this deepest level of his (or her) being where his (this) spiritual unity is achieved. But sadly enough, it seemed just as plain that this fundamental bent of the total self in all of us was inward, toward our own welfare. And so immersed as we were in it that we hardly seemed able to see this in ourselves, much less extricate ourselves from this dilemma... In all of us, moreover, some power within seemed to drive us to promote our own interests against those of our neighbors... We were caught willingly and yet unwillingly in a self-love from which we could not seem to achieve our own release, for what was wrong was our will itself. Whenever we willed something, it was our own distorted will that did the willing, so that we could not will the good. Though quite free to will whatever we wanted to do in a given situation, we were not free to will to love others, because the will did not really want to.⁸

I remember the first time I read this account thinking to myself: Geez, you can create a case to justify just about anything. Perhaps more than anything else, that goes for religion and politics. That's probably why we were given the age-old advice never to talk about these topics.

Tucked away in the 19th chapter of Leviticus, amidst instructions to be a holy people, and among another things, to turn away from idols, to not let your cattle breed with a different kind, to not eat any flesh with blood in it, and so on, the Lord commands... "you shall love your neighbor as yourself..." (Leviticus 19:18)

Perhaps to insure that the neighbor you are to love is not only those of your own people, a few verses down the page there are also instructions that...

...When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him (or her) wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him (or her) as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.... (Leviticus 19:33-34)

That's followed in the opening verses of the next chapter, however, by an admonition to put to death anyone who serves the god Molech and therefore lives and worships in a different way

than those who belonged to the Hebrew people.

This tension between a notion of holiness as the exclusive claim of God's people as chosen, or the notion of holiness as being chosen for the sake of the whole world, in the service of others - this tension between the conditional and the unconditional regard for the other - exists throughout the Hebrew scriptures. You can use these scriptures to create a case to justify either point of view. And in fact, many have done so, and continue to do so, both those who claim these scriptures as their own, and those who claim them as part of their religious heritage.

So the important question here is this: Why does one person argue for one reading of the tradition, and another person for a different reading? How is it that one person sees the conditional, and another see the unconditional? It must lie with something deeper than merely the rational, even the moral or religious. It must have to do with a more fundamental orientation, that lies at the heart of who one is. It must depend (as Gilkey says) "...on the fundamental character, direction, and loyalty of (one's) self as a whole; of the "bent," so to speak, of this deepest level of (one's) being...."

A scribe asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus asks for his reading of the tradition. Love God with your whole being and your neighbor as yourself, is the way the scribe states his case. To which Jesus replies, if you do this, you will live.

But that's not the end of it. "Who is my neighbor," the scribe asks. It's not merely a question of loving one's neighbor - of the imperative - but also a question of who is my neighbor - of the indicative. Whom should I consider to be my neighbor? What conditions must the other meet to justify my unconditional regard?

By way of answer, Jesus might have used the example of Ruth - the Moabitess, the outsider, the woman, the widow - who, upon the death of her Hebrew husband, could have returned to her own land and people. But who chose instead to return to the land of the Israelites with her beloved mother-in-law Naomi, "... for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." That's one answer to the question of "who is my neighbor?" Anyone who casts their lot with us, who puts themselves under the protection of our God, regardless of race or nationality or gender or station in life, he or she is to be considered our neighbor.

Or Jesus could have chosen the story of Jonah, who resists the call of God to preach repentance to the heathen city of Nineveh. Jonah, who has more regard for the plant that gives him a bit of shade and then withers in the heat of the day, than he does for the people of Nineveh, even after they have repented. Let the

wideness of God's love and mercy, extending even to the foreigner, be your guide. Even the unrepentant foreigner should be considered our neighbor.

But Jesus chooses to tell his own story, of the Samaritan who lived outside of the chosen circle, who cares for the man who falls among robbers and is left for dead in a ditch. What's interesting about this parable - which goodness knows has become such a part of our cultural currency - is that the question that Jesus poses back to the scribe is not, "Do you understand now that anyone in need, like this man in the ditch, should be considered your neighbor?" Or "do you not see that even a despised Samaritan can be good, and therefore worthy of our unconditional regard?" No, Jesus turns the indicative back into the imperative. "Who proved to be a neighbor to the person in need?"

The burning questions are now, and will be, how will we as Christians seek to maintain the integrity of our own faith while relating to people of other traditions? ... One way to do it is to observe the rule of Saint Benedict and welcome these strangers as we would Jesus Christ.

In her book *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, Kathleen Norris writes about the tradition of hospitality practiced in ancient Christian monasteries:

"Visits to monasteries are as old as monasteries themselves. We think of monks as being remote from the world, but Saint Benedict, writing in the sixth century, notes that a monastery is never without guests, and admonishes monks to 'receive all guests as Christ.' Monks have been quick to recognize that such hospitality, while undoubtedly a blessing, can also create burdens for them. A story said to originate in a Russian Orthodox monastery has an older monk telling a younger one: 'I have finally learned to accept people as they are. Whatever they are in the world, a prostitute, a prime minister, it is all the same to me. But sometimes I see a stranger coming up the road and I say, "'Oh, Jesus Christ, is it you again?'"

There have been any number of strangers coming up the road lately in my neck of the woods. They've also been showing up at the Walmart, at the orientation for parents of 5th graders at the middle school, and in the radiology department at the hospital. They are strangers from all over the world, of religious and spiritual traditions other than the traditional American red, white and blue of Catholic, Protestant and Jew. This more recent wave of strangers started in 1965, with the signing of an immigration bill by Lyndon Johnson that paved the way for those coming from Africa and Asia. Since that time, one million new religious immigrants have come to the place where I live - metropolitan Chicago. What this means today is that one out of every seven persons in the Windy City is an immigrant of non-European ancestry and of a religion other than Christian or Jewish. There are: 500,000 Muslims praying in 60 mosques and community centers; 220,000 Buddhists, practicing in 32 temples and centers; 80,000 Hindus, worshipping in 19 temples, 18 of them in the suburbs; 20,000 Native Americans, representing 200 of the first nations; 5,000 Sikhs; 5,000 Jains; 5,000 Unitarians; 2,000 Bahais; 500 Zoroastrians; and, a whole host of other indigenous and New Age religions and spiritualities.

The landscape is changing not only in Chicago, but in every major metropolitan area across the United States and Canada, and in communities as small 10,000. In the next decade, it will not only be the mainline church or reform synagogue that will be our religious neighbor but also the mosque, the temple, the center, the gurdwara. And more and more, when there are misunderstandings or tensions or hostilities between religious and spiritual communities in the world, those same misunderstandings or tensions or hostilities will be felt among or with our neighbors around the corner.

The burning questions are now, and will be, how will we as Christians seek to maintain the integrity of our own faith while relating to people of other traditions? It is one thing to think about evangelism in the midst of those without a religious affiliation; what does it mean to proclaim the gospel to those who believe with their heart and mind and soul and strength that they too know God and are committed to serving their neighbor? How are we in the Church going to come to grips with our long-held and decisive views on the uniqueness and centrality of Jesus as the Christ for us with a religiously diverse and post-Christendom world? And how will we reconcile these long-held views about Jesus as the Christ with the commandment of this same Jesus to love these new neighbors as ourselves?

One way to do it is to observe the rule of Saint Benedict and welcome these strangers as we would Jesus Christ. To leave the indicative of "who is my neighbor?" to God and to focus on the imperative "to love my neighbor as myself." To welcome the Cambodian Buddhist and the Punjabi Sikh and the Nigerian Muslim as we would Jesus Christ. To heed this rule as an unconditional claim on us at the same time frees us from having to play God with our love.

But to say that we should welcome the stranger as we would Jesus Christ can also mean that the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ also comes to us in the Hindu, the Jew, the Jain. That the God we know in Jesus is also at work in the life of the stranger. That the God who is at work in our lives is reaching out to us through the welcoming of the stranger as much as through the scriptures, the Sunday morning service and the sacraments.

For some, I know, this is a tall order. For others, impossible. So be it. I'll take my chances with Saint Benedict on this one. But for virtually all of us it is very difficult when the neighbor is not only a stranger but also your enemy.

On this particular day I left the house at the usual time, and after dropping Dillon and Connor off at school, I drove into the city. I arrived at the Council office at the usual time, and began working my way through a long list of e-mails when the phone rang. It was Jeannette, our part-time bookkeeper.

"Dirk, are you alright?" she asked.

"Sure," I said.

"No, I mean, is everything alright?"

"Yes. I mean, we're down to our last dollar again, but so what else is new."

"No, are you alright physically?"

"Yes, sure. I'm fine. "

"Okay, I just wanted to make sure. Dirk, please take care."

Pre-occupied with my e-mails, I was only mildly puzzled by her questions as I hung up the phone. Ten minutes later my colleague Francesca arrived. "They've bombed the World Trade Center," she said. "Yeah, right," I said with a wave of my hand. "No, really," she said. We stumbled into our conference room to turn on the television in time to see the first tower come down, and my life, and hers, and all of our lives on the planet, changed forever.

With the Oklahoma City bombing the first impulse in the news media and public perception seemed to be that the perpetrators must be Islamic. I had this curious and terribly mixed sense of relief when it turned out to be homegrown terrorism, though no less horrific. But with September 11th, the perpetrators were from the Middle East and Islam was clearly implicated. Which created an enormous backlash against the Muslim community in the United States. In the days following September 11th virtually every mosque and Islamic school in metropolitan Chicago had to be shut down under a siege of bomb threat and death threats.

Two weeks later the organization I serve organized a series of round-the-clock weekend vigils at two prominent mosques, with groups from over 50 local churches, synagogues, temples, gurdwaras, colleges, universities, and service organizations taking two-hour watches. It was a statement to the broader community that we needed to distinguish these long-standing, peace-loving Islamic neighbors from terrorists. Sadly the effort to distinguish the two in the news media and public perception continues to be a struggle.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. " But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your loving god who is in heaven; for God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the just, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your cohorts, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles to the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your loving God in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Yes, this is a tough one. I have sympathy for the Irish-Catholic fireman from the Bronx who complained bitterly: "I can't stomach this Richard Gere kind of peace, love and forgiveness crap. Let him come down here to Ground Zero every day and get down on his hands and knees to sift through the ashes for the bones of my buddies and then tell me to forgive the bastards who did this. No, it's going to be an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth on this one."

Indeed, there are those who say that the ethic of loving your enemy doesn't really apply when it comes to terrorists. That it doesn't belong in matters of national defense and geo-politic

realities. That it is too idealistic.

I remember reading or hearing William Sloane Coffin describe three basic stances toward the world: isolationist, interventionist, and internationalist. Following the events of September 11th, our country had an opportunity to take an internationalist approach to dealing with this tragedy. Instead of declaring war on terrorism, this unspeakable act could have been declared a crime against humanity. The United States could have appealed to the international community that suddenly felt great sympathy for the lone remaining superpower, asking them to join with us in bringing those responsible to justice. We could have enlisted the support of suddenly sympathetic moderate Arab and Muslim nations in putting pressure on those countries that are actively engaged in state-sponsored terrorism. In the process we could have strengthened international institutions – the United Nations, the World Court – in addressing a growing specter of anxiety and violence that will haunt my sons’ generation for decades to come.

Many would say that this is not realistic. That using this approach we will never bring those responsible to justice. But then again, after bombing the hell out of Afghanistan we still haven’t found Osama Bin Laden. Many would say this approach is not the way root out state-sponsored terrorism. But then again, even after the defeat of Afghanistan and Iraq, we haven’t made a dent in the terrorist threat.

The fact of the matter is, all the military might in the world is not going to win the war against terrorism. As starkly stated by Saad Mehio in his December 2, 2001 editorial in the *New York Times*: “The United States has lost its sovereignty. Suddenly security in the streets of Washington, New York, Boston and Los Angeles is inextricably linked to the curriculum of schools in Peshawar, Mazar-i-Sharif, Cairo, Algiers and Deoband.” Suddenly, human relations are as crucial to national security and the prospects for world peace as the number of aircraft carriers and F-16 fighter jets and “smart bombs” in our arsenal.

The interventionist approach we’ve taken to September 11th has appealed to our fears at home and has been used to bully those abroad. We have not appealed to our best selves, or to the humanity of our enemies, much less our allies. This is my understanding of why Jesus says not to return evil for evil, but to turn the other cheek, to give up your cloak, to go the extra mile. In doing so, you appeal to the humanity of those you call your enemy.

If not forever, at least first. At least at every opportunity that presents itself. But some would argue, there is no humanity in a Saddam Hussein, or a Bin Laden. Granted. But nevertheless we must be careful with that term “enemy.” Remember, we once used it to describe the British, the Germans, the Soviets. The fact of the

matter is we might be able to march on Baghdad and overthrow Saddam Hussein without allies – who really believed we wouldn’t, eventually – but we will not win the struggle against terrorism without allies

The fact of the matter is, one way or another, we will eventually have to appeal to the humanity of those children who currently receive only the back of the hand of the one remaining world superpower, who struggle in poverty and degradation intensified by the indifferent forces of globalization. We have to appeal to their humanity or they too will become our enemies. This is not the idealism of Jesus. This is the realism of his gospel.

But what happens when your enemy happens to be not the one from halfway around the world – from a foreign country, speaking in an ancient language, worshipping a seemingly different God, at the other end of the political-socio-economic food chain – but someone who worships at a church that bears that same name as yours? What happens when your enemy is a member of your own faith community, your own...denomination?

Okay, love your neighbor. All right, love your enemy.
But, wait a minute: Love one another?
Yes, I’ve saved perhaps the toughest call to last.

Okay, love your neighbor. All right, love your enemy. But, wait a minute: Love one another? Yes, I’ve saved perhaps the toughest call to last.

In an upper room, on his last night with his disciples, with those whom he also calls his friends, Jesus commands his followers to “...love one another, as I have loved you.” Jesus was referring here, of course, to the inner circle, to the family of believers, to those who would someday belong to that community of faith we call the Church. How are we going to do this?

The place to begin is with the acknowledgement that there will never be complete agreement in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, much less in the Presbyterian Church (USA). There are cases to be made and more than enough material from our readings of our texts and history to justify our own points of view. We are never going to completely agree on how to read scripture, on the meaning and use of our creeds and confessions, on christology, on matters of sexuality, on approaches to conversion, on our views of salvation, on our understanding of and relations with those who follow other religious and spiritual traditions, and on and on and on. Never.

And given that, then I suppose the question becomes: Can there be meaningful agreement? Can there be enough agreement on enough of a common understanding and practice of the faith that justifies our continued communion with each other? Maybe, maybe not. Where one draws the line here is likely going to be pretty much in line with where one draws the line on all these other matters. Or, is that in fact what finally matters?

The writer James Carroll recalls what it was like growing up a son in the house of US Air Force General Joseph Carroll during the 1950s. General Carroll was the founding director of the National Defense Agency. In their home was the Red Phone – yes, the

same Red Phone that was in the Oval Office. The Red Phone that would ring only in two instances – one of a test of the system, and the other to announce the ultimate threat, the ultimate danger, of World War III.

James recalls driving home once late at night with his father from his office at the Pentagon – his father looking out of the car window at the lights of Washington DC - and his father's warning: "...one of these nights I might not come home. If that happens, I might not even be able to call. If that happens, it will be up to you and Joe, just get your mother and the boys, and go." James understood this as his father's way of expressing their bond as a family, the bond as a father and son.

Then in the late 60s, the Vietnam War began the chief focus of his father's military service. James came to oppose the war, but feared that to openly express this might damage their relationship. He came to learn, however, that his father's sense of his own integrity was not determined by his son's approval.

Nevertheless this became more of an issue when one of his brothers, Dennis, became subject to the draft. At the moment of choice, Dennis became a resisting conscientious objector. At first, his father was shocked and hurt. This was followed by an ongoing agony of argument and emotional pain in the house that seemed to escalate as the war escalated.

Dennis applied for conscientious objector status and was denied. He applied a second time and was denied again. The last time he applied he knew that if his appeal were rejected again, he would have to go into the underground, or leave the country, and go against his conscience and serve. And this last time he was informed that he could appear in the company of his lawyer.

Before becoming a general, his father was a lawyer. Dennis asked his father to appear with him. His father went, general's uniform and all. He argued on his son's behalf, and CO status was granted.

James says that when his brother Dennis told him he was going to ask his father to defend him, James thought his brother was crazy. That this would be the occasion of the final rupture, that it would destroy the family. What he came to realize later is what a profound act of trust his brother was making in his father, and that to be trusted in that way, for most people – for his father – was irresistible.

James likens his family story to the relationship of Jesus to the Father. He describes this as "two acts of integrity in relation to each other. Where there is abandonment, it is mutual, a consequence of two freedoms at work on each other. And where there is forgiveness and repossession, it goes both ways."

I would also liken this to the only kind of relationship that ultimately works within the Church, "of acts of integrity in relation to each other." For trust is not the same as agreement. And more than agreement, trust is the glue of any relationship.

How can we engender more trust in the Presbyterian Church

(USA)? For starters, we can give up the knee-jerk notion that those with whom we disagree simply don't care as much as we do about the faith and fellowship of the Church. That what must really lie behind their view has more to do with personal or political agendas, while those who think like we do are untouched by such mixed motives.

We can, in fact, own up to our own assumptions and give those who see things a different way the benefit of the doubt. We can listen to each other long and hard in order to really understand what the other is saying, and more importantly, why. We can do this, without losing our integrity and authenticity. We can do this, whether or not we come to any consensus or compromise. We can come to understand one another, trust one another, without agreeing with one another.

So I pray for the ministry of Charles Colson that is freeing men and women from the demonic grip of impoverishment, crime and prison, even though I'm appalled by his views on the separation of church and state. I cannot go past a Salvation Army bell ringer without offering my spare change for the soup and bread that will be given in the name of Christ, even though I'm not crazy about the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement that will be preached with dessert. (This, of course, is the short list of my successes in this area: I won't bore you with the long lists of my current failures to practice what I'm preaching.)

And too, I believe that we must give up our claim to being right, without giving up the rightness of our claims. By that I mean that we acknowledge our grasp of the truth is always hindered by the limitations of our knowledge and experience, and colored by our biases and blind spots. That this applies as much to us as to those who see it another way. And that is one of the reasons why we seek the broader counsel of the Church.

In listening to the historic proceedings of the United States Supreme Court to consider the disputed presidential vote count in Florida, I was struck by the way, occasionally, a justice appeared to be berating one of the lawyers for his or her argument. What I learned is that this is a common practice. The justices look to the lawyers to present the case, in all of its facets, to play out all the relevant positions and options, in order to help the court as a whole in making its deliberations.

Can we find a similar way to look at our collective deliberations in the Church? Can we search together through our disagreements, acknowledging the incompleteness of any of our views? Can we seek the mind of God, the heart of Christ, the movement of the Spirit in our midst, by earnestly looking for elements of truth advocated by those who sit on the other side of the pew? Can we prayerfully and passionately make our case, but always on the way to a larger sense of the truth? Can we see the greater value in seeking the collective wisdom of the Church, even when we think a particular decision is profoundly and completely and utterly wrong?

As one who cares deeply about the need to be biblically and theologically clear about our faith, nevertheless I want to propose

that the peace, unity and purity of the Church do *not* depend upon it. And thank God for that, for if it does, then I truly believe we are hopelessly lost.

Whatever truth we find in the Bible and our creeds and confessions it is always according to our reading of those texts. Our theology is, as Augustine put it, faith-seeking understanding, so ultimately the reality of our faith is beyond our conceptions about it. Again, it has to do with this deepest level of who we are. And given the nature of language and thought itself, I don't believe we're ever going to get it completely right on paper. But we do have some hope of getting it right in the way that we live, according to our bent.

So, as we must continue, in a real way, to endlessly disagree with each other about serious matters that have far-reaching implications for our own lives, for our life together, for our life and witness in the world, we can nevertheless, along the way we, come to trust each other. It is upon such trust that our unity as Christians rests. What would it mean for us to spend as much thought and time and effort *building trust* between us as we do honing and debating our doctrinal stances and position papers?

Several months ago I attended the annual meeting of the Kentucky Council of Churches. While standing in line waiting for lunch on the closing day, I found myself talking with other ecumenical and interreligious types. A Lutheran minister who directs a local ecumenical association was talking about a group of Cambodian refugees being sponsored by a Southern Baptist Church in his community.

"Of course, they're all Buddhists," I remember him saying. "It has been very interesting to watch the Southern Baptists struggle with that."

I don't remember who made the next comment – whether it was he, or someone else, or even me, but I distinctly remember thinking what was said. "Interesting to watch Southern Baptists discover that Buddhists are human beings too."

Then he added, "But what's just as interesting is how the rest of us have discovered the same thing about Southern Baptists."

The fact of the matter is, I'm more comfortable with Buddhists than I am with Southern Baptists. I feel more affinity with the hospitality of Sikhism than I do with the morality of the *Presbyterian Layman*. I don't need to convert Muslims and Jains. I can listen to the litany of their beliefs and practices, agree and disagree with them, but in the end I don't need for them to have a change of mind or heart. But I can't say the same thing for Parker Williamson. I want him to change. I want his view of the faith to be different. What does it mean to love Parker Williamson? What does it mean to let him be the way he is in just the same way that I would a Baha'I or a Shinto practitioner? How can I come to view the intra-religious diversity of my own denomination in the same way that I do the interreligious diversity of the world?

I know the answer to this one. It's a decision. To work on the

deepest level of my being. To work on my bent. On a bent towards love. To my neighbor. To my love enemy. To love one another. Of course, I can make a case to do otherwise, for all sorts of reasons.

There is a story that I tell to all sorts of people. And it is interesting that people of many different traditions claim this story as their own.

Two brothers – one a bachelor, the other married – owned a farm whose fertile soil yielded an abundance of grain. Half the grain went to one brother and half to the other.

All went well at first. Then, every now and then, the married man began to wake with a start from his sleep at night and think: "this isn't fair. My brother isn't married, he's all alone, and he gets only half the produce of the farm. Here I am with a wife and five kids, so I have all the security I need in my old age. But who will care for my poor brother when he gets old? He needs to save much more for the future than he does at present, so his need is obviously greater than mine."

With that he would get out of bed, steal over to his brother's place, and pour a sackful of grain into his brother's granary.

The bachelor brother too began to get the same attacks. Every once in a while he would wake from his sleep and say to himself: "This simply isn't fair. My brother has a wife and five kids and he gets only half the produce of the land. Now I have no one except myself to support. So is it just that my poor brother, whose need is obviously greater than mine, should receive exactly as much as I do?" Then he would get out of bed and pour a sackful of grain into his brother's granary.

One night they got out of bed at the same time and ran into each other, each with a sack of grain on his back!

Many years later, after their death, the story leaked out. So when the townsfolk wanted to build a – and here you can fill in the blank according to your own tradition – church, they chose the spot at which the two brothers met, for they could not think of any place in the town that was holier than that one.¹⁰

If, my friends, we can learn to love our neighbor, the stranger, the enemy, and if we can learn to love another, like these two brothers, then the whole world will indeed become holy ground.

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“The Spirit gives us courage”

The Rev. Dr. Jack Rogers, moderator of the 213th General Assembly

Witherspoon Society Awards Dinner at the 215th General Assembly
2003



Jack Rogers (left) receives the Andrew Murray award from Kent Winters-Hazelton.

I am deeply grateful for the Andrew Murray Award and for the faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the Witherspoon Society continues to give.

I had thought that I would have a little fun by speaking to you tonight about the seeming paradox in having a theological conservative, like John Witherspoon, as the namesake for a progressive social justice advocacy group. But, alas, the *Presbyterian Layman* website beat me to it. The article was a criticism of the Witherspoon Society's resistance to America's preemptive war with Iraq. That was followed by a letter to the editor which began, "There is indeed a profound irony in the fact that one of the most radically leftist groups in the PCUSA has named itself after John Witherspoon." As usual with the *Presbyterian Layman*, they dealt with only one aspect of the story, and they got it only partly right!

The *Layman's* basic stance has always been that the church should not be involved in political matters. If we interpret their meaning from the positions they take, however, it would seem clear that they mean the church should only be involved on the conservative republican side of political matters. During democratic administrations we hear only criticism if the church supports government policy. Now we hear criticism of the church for not supporting government policy. That is characteristic of American fundamentalists since they turned to politics with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

My good friend and former colleague at Fuller Seminary, Mel White, is now the

Executive Director of Soulforce, an organization that advocates for equal rights of gay and lesbian persons in the churches. Mel made his living for some years as a ghost writer. During that time he wrote Jerry Falwell's autobiography, as well as books for Pat Robertson and Billy Graham. Since Mel came out as a gay man, none of these conservative Christian leaders will have anything to do with their former friend. So, Mel and his partner, Gary, lived for over six months in a cottage they rented across the street from Falwell's fundamentalist Baptist church in Lynchburg, Virginia. On Sunday mornings they sit in the fifth row of the sanctuary smiling up at Falwell. In a recent newsletter, Mel reported that Falwell announced to the congregation that he (Falwell), James Dobson, Pat Robertson, and other Fundamentalist leaders were called to the White House for a "Presidential Briefing." Quoting Romans 13, Jerry claimed that Mr. Bush was "God's man" and that to disagree with the President is to "risk the wrath of God."¹

In light of Falwell's comment I was especially pleased to come across a quote from a Dutch Reformed Christian, our 26th President, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt said: "To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public."²

America's recent war in Iraq has divided our country not only politically, but also religiously. Religious fundamentalists proclaim the war as moral and just and according to God's will. Almost all of the institutional churches, except the

Southern Baptists, have denounced a preemptive strike against another sovereign country without a United Nations mandate, said that it failed to meet the criteria of just war, and decried Bush's use of religious language to justify it. We may see some of the same division in this General Assembly as various advocacy groups attack our denomination's position.

We would be unwise to see this as a division between liberals and evangelicals. The media tend to lump fundamentalists and evangelicals together. They further assume that all evangelicals hold conservative political positions. That is a mistake. Fundamentalists are the militant fringe of conservatism. "Evangelicals" is one name for the broad middle of the church – persons who have a commitment to Christ as savior and sovereign, who look to the Bible as their authority for how to be rightly related to God and their neighbor, and who want to share and live out the full message of the Scripture.

Twenty-eight years ago, I wrote a book entitled *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*. In it, I said that an "unbiblical assumption is that those in authority are always to be obeyed as instruments of God. Christians often isolate Rom., ch. 13 and take it out of the context of the whole of Scripture. According to one of the main themes of Scripture, however, to make any person or thing absolute except God himself (*sic.*) is idolatry. 'Israel – love it or Leave It' was certainly not a slogan the

prophets could have accepted. Because they loved their nation and their people they were constantly criticizing them and calling them to repentance. Jesus' disciples were acutely aware that conflicts could arise between allegiance to God and loyalty to earthly authorities. When such conflicts occurred, the disciples found it necessary to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19; 7:51-53; 12:6-11).³ I believed that when I wrote it as a faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary nearly 3 decades ago. I still believe it today. The only things I would change would be to eliminate the masculine pronoun with regard to God and to refer to people, rather than just men.

To be evangelical is to seek to hear and obey the whole Gospel. I take most Presbyterians to be evangelicals in that sense. When Jesus, "filled with the power of the Spirit," returned to his home town of Nazareth he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." When he rolled up the scroll and returned it to the attendant he said: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The obligations of service that Jesus took upon himself he has also bequeathed to us.

The *Presbyterian Layman* and other conservative groups may wish to claim the Bible, patriotism, and John Witherspoon, but they are not theirs exclusively. John Witherspoon disagreed with the *Layman* in the most fundamental principle of its stance. He believed that the church should be involved in social and political affairs. He was involved as an individual, but he also called the church as an institution to be at work in society.

One of Witherspoon's first acts, leading toward the American revolution, was on behalf of the institutional church. After the Minutemen were fired on in 1774, he

headed a committee of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, and on their behalf wrote a letter, giving ministers permission to speak out regarding the revolution.

In 1776, when John Witherspoon signed the Declaration of Independence, he wore his Geneva gown and preaching tabs. He was always clear that he represented the church, as a minister of the gospel. He continued to wear his clerical garb as a member of the Continental Congress from 1776-1782.

Witherspoon stood astride the gulf that some wanted to create between individual and social action, between piety and learning, between individual conscience and institutional commitment. He had one foot firmly planted on each side of these divides.

Before Witherspoon's arrival in the United States, American Presbyterianism had been deeply divided between the New Side which stressed the importance of personal religious experience, and the Old Side which insisted on an intellectual understanding of the doctrines in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Witherspoon never hinted that he had had a New Side conversion experience. He held that one's conversion would show in one's character. Apparently his character convinced the New Side people of his piety. At the same time, his Scottish education, including a doctor's degree in theology, reassured the Old Side people as to his learning. One trustee of the College of New Jersey wrote to Witherspoon that his coming as President would "effectually make up the ancient quarrel among the Presbyterians here."⁴

As an educator, Witherspoon balanced the values of the church and the academy. He said: "Piety without learning is but little profitable and learning without piety is pernicious to others and ruinous to its possessor."

Committed as he was to the well-being of the College in Princeton of which he was President, he could allow the students freedom to exercise their consciences. After the Boston Tea Party

the students confiscated and burned the college's winter supply of tea. The Trustees found the act "unwarrantable and riotous." Witherspoon remained calm and supported the students.⁵

Witherspoon made his mark, not only as a patriot, but as a Presbyterian. In 1786, Witherspoon chaired a committee to develop a book of order and discipline. Perhaps, when he saw that the Scottish model of authority from the top down would not prevail, he dropped from the committee. The first *Book of Order*, in 1788, is more the work of Dr. John Rodgers. However, John Witherspoon did write a short preface to the Plan of Government which is still in our *Book of Order*, beginning with the statement from the Westminster Confession that God alone is Lord of the conscience.⁶ In May of 1789, Witherspoon was the preacher and acted as moderator until the General Assembly elected John Rodgers as its first American Moderator.

I have spent most of my adult life studying the history of biblical interpretation and our Reformed confessions. I had the great privilege to serve on the Special Committee that drafted "A Brief Statement of Faith" that we adopted into our *Book of Confessions* in 1991. The biblical balance that Witherspoon exemplified and that we all need and seek is for me summed up in these lines from a Brief Statement. The first phrase I took as the title of my remarks tonight.

"The Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to
Christ as Lord and savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and
culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long
silenced,
and to work with others for justice,
freedom, and peace."⁷

I am deeply honored to receive the Andrew Murray Award from a group whose statement of purpose reflects our biblical and confessional sense of mission and calling. "Listening and learning from others, engaging the church and the world God loves, we witness, through demonstration and proclamation, to the

whole gospel of God's radical love." May you, consistent with the character of your namesake, John Witherspoon, continue to uphold liberty of conscience, justice and love for all of God's people, because that is what the Gospel proclaims.

Jack Rogers, May 27, 2003

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- ³ Jack Rogers, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, Second Edition (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001), pp. 110-111.
- ⁴ Cited in Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman, *John Witherspoon: Parson, Politician, Patriot* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 66.
- ⁵ Cited in Stohlman, p. 98.
- ⁶ Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971), p. 142, "Witherspoon adhered to the position on religious freedom set forth in the Adopting Act of 1729."
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Rick Ufford-Chase

Christian living in a time of Empire

Rick Ufford-Chase addresses the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship breakfast

The annual Peace Fellowship Breakfast heard a provocative talk by Rick Ufford-Chase, the director of BorderLinks, a center for study and encounter based in Tucson, Arizona, and maintaining intensive programs on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Speaking under the title "Empire and Church: Pitfalls and Priorities for the Presbyterian Church in a time of Globalization," Ufford-Chase began by reading Mark's account of Jesus' healing of the Gerasene demoniac.

This man, filled with rage and threatening everyone around him, Ufford-Chase described as an image of our own fearful situation after 9/11: We are afraid, and are desperate to do something to bind the threat and protect ourselves. And we'll do anything, use any force to achieve security. And so we too become people of violence, raging, threatening the rest of the world – with military might and with the huge force of economic empire.

"So the question for all of us," he continued, "is 'What would it mean today to grasp Jesus' vision of the Gerasene who is clothed and in his right mind?' What would it mean to cast out the demon of empire backed up by total, overwhelming military domination – the military of shock and awe, or as Indonesia named its own military offensive in a copycat move this week, 'Hunt and Crush'? Get ready, because following Jesus down this path is going to call into question the foundation of everything that you and I, the children and the church of empire, have been taught to believe. It's going to demand the courage to follow Jesus Christ, to rethink who we are as people of faith. We will have to become protagonists in building a new economic paradigm in which there is enough for everyone, and all of us – all of us – feel secure."

This led him to offer two "foundational principles of that paradigm:

"So as church in the heart of the empire, if that is the world we desire, what is our task?"

"First, we must stand for basic, uncompromising, economic security – for *all* the world's citizens – in the midst of globalization. How we respond to economic empire building is going to be the defining moral challenge of our time. The church, our church, must be in the center of that debate. We should be on the streets of Seattle and Quebec to insist on democratic participation in shaping our economic relationships. ... We need to be a voice of reason and conscience in the board rooms of the corporations to stand firm for the values of equity and dignity for all of us. Most importantly, we must do the hard work of educating Presbyterians about the Biblical mandate for economic justice and Jesus' radical notions of security. It's called MAKING DISCIPLES!

"Second, we must stand for non-violence in a world of terrorism. No one in this room is any safer today than we were on September 12th, 2001. We are not safer because of the war against terrorism. We are not safer because of the war against Osama Bin Laden. We are no safer because of the War against Iraq. The myth that we are more secure is the worst kind of lie that depends on a hollow, me first kind of patriotism and a blind obedience to authority that is the antithesis of the very core of what it means to be a Christian."

For the full text of this talk, go to http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/empire_and_church.htm

On the defeat of the Des Moines Overture

The Ordination Question

GA committee approved of ordination of lgbt's, but Assembly said No

This brief summary is based on Gene TeSelle's report on the Assembly, which was sent to all Witherspoon members.

Once again a major issue of the Assembly was the ordination of gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender members. Des Moines Presbytery presented a two-part overture: removal of G-6.0106b from the Book of Order, which must be voted on in the presbyteries, and an "authoritative interpretation" (henceforth AI), which could go into effect immediately, erasing all previous AIs pending the change.

There was tension between those who wanted the amendment to go to the presbyteries this year and those who predicted that, if it went, it would be defeated. Before the Assembly convened, the Witherspoon Executive Committee issued a statement in support of the Des Moines overture, urging that "justice must not be postponed for the sake of a hoped-for but inauthentic 'peace' in the church." Acknowledging that all progressive groups agree on the end but not on the means and the timetable, we urged all those groups to join in seeking for the proponents of ordination a possibility of making their case to the whole assembly, "and allowing the Spirit to work through this Assembly as has so frequently happened in the past."

After hearing moving testimony from many people affected by the ban on ordination either directly or indirectly, the Committee on Church Orders and Ministry approved the Des Moines overture by a 35/29/2 vote. Before the recommendation went to the floor of the Assembly, some commissioners wanted to separate the two parts of the overture, with the hope that the AI might gain approval even if the constitutional amendment might not.

But the first commissioner to be recognized by the Moderator made a motion not to "refer," but in effect to take no action, noting that the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church was already dealing with the issue and urging the church to pray for the Task Force during this time of "discernment." This won by a vote of 68% to 32%. Another motion to vote only on the AI was defeated by a similar vote.

The afternoon had its share of ironies along with the shock and the tears. The Witherspoon executive committee took note of some of them in its statement, which is in the next column.

JUSTICE DELAYED – AGAIN – IS JUSTICE DENIED – AGAIN

A statement from the Witherspoon Society board
May 30, 2003

The officers of The Witherspoon Society are dismayed by today's action of the 215th General Assembly in rejecting yet again God's call to do justice, as sought by the Des Moines overture to remove G-6.0106b from our Book of Order.

We recognize the concern of many sincere Presbyterians for patience in the continuing effort to shape a more just, more welcoming church. We recognize the weariness of many after years of conflict, and now of litigation. The exhaustion afflicts many of us as individuals, and it weakens our whole church.

But we still hear God's call to do justice, and we remember those saints who have reminded us that we are called to be faithful, not to be successful.

The afternoon brought its share of ironies:

The glorious motto of this Assembly, "A House of Prayer for All Peoples," shines in a house of prayer for less than all.

The Moderator, following the vote, invited the commissioners to join in singing "Jesus loves me, this I know." But not everyone felt included in that love.

Before the afternoon session ended, there was an urgent reminder of the church's growing shortage of ministers – just after the Assembly had voted to continue excluding a large percentage of its members from that call.

There were expressions of sympathy for the pain felt by many, but no hint of hope for changing the situation that causes such pain.

The debates on this issue have demonstrated anew the ambiguities of power: Those who hold power in the church by virtue of their positions can hasten the changes that we all seek, if they so choose. Those who are excluded and therefore have limited voice and limited power in the church, must continue their struggle for their rightful place in the "house of worship for all peoples."

The Witherspoon Society will continue to stand with our sisters and brothers in the struggle for justice in our church, not only for the sake of those now excluded, but also for the sake of the health of our church as a whole.

It is not clear now what the coming months may hold, but we pledge to follow their lead to the best of our abilities, in cooperation with all those who seek justice and a church that will truly be "a house of worship for all peoples."

A prayer after the defeat of Des Moines overture

After the debate on the Des Moines overture, calling for the removal G-6.0106b from the Book of Order, the Assembly voted in essence to take no action. Moderator Susan Andrews, at the close of that session of the Assembly, invited Bill Moss, co-moderator of More Light Presbyterians, to lead the commissioners in the closing prayer.

His prayer seemed to capture the feelings of many – feelings of sorrow for the continuing injustice in our church, commitment to the continuing struggle, and hope that in time justice will come.

O Holy One—our Father and Mother of us all—we bring you thanks and celebrate being the church of Jesus Christ. We lift up the words of the prophet Isaiah that have been placed before this Assembly: “...make them joyful in my house of prayer...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Is. 56:7) It is in this house that we, as your people, reverently enter—not only to offer you prayer, but also to struggle to discern what it means to be a house for all people.

We thank you, O Holy One, for the opportunity to serve you in this Assembly. Although we spend much time debating and voting ‘yes’ and ‘no’ on issues affecting your Church, help us to understand that we are not judged by our perceived successes regarding the outcome of each vote, but what is important is our faithfulness. Our faithfulness to seek your will; our faithfulness to justice, to the truth; our faithfulness to the Gospel; our faithfulness to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ; our faithfulness to your call in our lives and to your ministry.

O God, we pray for the peace, unity and purity of your Church. Help us to remember that there is no peace without justice, truth and faithfulness. Help us to understand that there is no unity without accepting the diversity that is the Church of Jesus Christ. Help us to comprehend that there is no purity without integrity. We find that purity in our ability to accept and love each individual in your church without reservation. It is a purity based on acceptance and wholeness, not judgment and conformity.

O God help us to remember the words of the Apostle Paul as we continue the work of this Assembly. “Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (I Cor. 12:12 & 13) It is this love that you have shown us in your son Jesus. We pray that we may fully love each other and live our lives in the light of that love.

Now give us faith, give us hope, and most importantly enrich our lives with love.

Be with us as we break for dinner. Bless us as we join together in meal.

We pray this in the name of the Christ, your faithful servant. Amen.

Reflections on dealing with G-6.0106b

At what speed shall we move? A statistical view

by GA observer Becky Lindsay

Differences of opinion at the 215th General Assembly, about how fast the movement for full inclusion in the Presbyterian church of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons should proceed, have left the major supportive groups confused. Some involved in the struggle, fearing that the movement will become stalled, want to push ahead with their agendas, while others, including the moderator of the Assembly and many afraid that continued dissension will bring about the demise of the PC(USA), advocate caution declaring that “this is not the time.”

Who then is right? At what speed should the movement proceed? As is customary for the human race, we keep looking for one perfect solution, where everyone is in agreement as to where, when, and with what force to move. Experience shows that this is an unlikely event.

On any given issue, one can predict that various groups and individuals will be spread across a continuum from extremely conservative through moderate, progressive, to extremely liberal views. Generally, one can expect the bell curve effect. That is, a small percentage of the groups or individuals will be found at the far ends of the graph and the bulk of the population will be centered about the mean, or average. Too often in recent years, votes on issues pertaining to ordination of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender person have produced a skewed curve with bulges closer to the extreme positions. Thus the concern the PC(USA) might split in two.

In order for full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people to occur, a shift of the mean toward the inclusive viewpoint must occur churchwide. A shift in position of any mean will be the result not of a single action on the part of one particular group, but of the sum total of forces acting upon the situation. In fact, the very danger of homogeneous thinking is to be overcome by inertia. Cars, boulders, water, and opinions only change when they are acted upon by unbalanced forces. Balanced forces make for stability and security, but they don’t produce movement.

One of the forces that has a tendency to produce a shift in a mean is the presence of an outlier. [For people like your editor who are not terribly up on statistics, that’s pronounced OUT-lie-er.] Statistically, an outlier is a piece or group of data which lies at a considerable distance from the mean. An outlier is significantly separated from the bulk of the data, a lone point off by itself.



The magnitude of the effect that an outlier has depends upon the size of the sample of data. Where there are only a few data points, the outlier exercises a strong pull on the mean, shifting it considerably in the direction of the outlier. Where there are many data points, the outlier influences the mean less, but nevertheless causes it to shift, maybe only slightly, but still in the direction of the outlier. Therefore, one pastor who insists upon calling the blessing of same-sex couples “marriage,” may find himself/herself alone, out in front of general population of Presbyterians that favor full inclusion. Not many, even those of progressive opinions, will be willing to join the pastor at such an extreme position, but many may suddenly move into a position of support for “holy unions.”

The outlier at the 215th General Assembly was most definitely the group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people present at the Assembly. This group had a considerable effect at the committee (small group) level on the passage of the Des Moines Overture, which proposed striking G-6.0106b from the Book of Order and adopting new authoritative interpretation on the matter. At the open hearing where this group was allowed to speak before the Committee on Church Orders and Ministry, its members greatly outnumbered those opposing the overture (27 speaking in favor to 10 against) and their stories of growing up in the Presbyterian Church and then being denied the right to fulfill their calling, of having to put their lives on hold—some of them for twenty-five years—had a tremendous emotional impact on the committee. More than likely, their presence was a prime factor in pulling enough votes to secure the narrow margin that got the Des Moines Overture passed by the committee.

In the plenary session (large group), however, where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons are for the most part denied voice and vote because they cannot be ordained, their ability to influence the Assembly was much diminished. The substitute motion

referring the matter to the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity won by a great majority, 431-92.

Since the bulge in the middle of a normal bell curve usually includes 68% of the data, the fact that over 82% of the commissioners who voted favored referral indicates that a significant number of people at both ends of the spectrum had to leave their traditional positions and move closer to the mean. The discouraging message that this data gives us is that a good number of those persons working for full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people may have adopted a “wait and see” approach. The encouraging message is threefold: (1) that a significant number of people who usually vote against any attempt to rescind G-6.0106b chose not to vote down the Des Moines Overture, (2) that these people may be more willing to wait and listen to what the task force has to say, and (3) that the 215th General Assembly found common ground to stand upon, thereby preventing the feared breakup of the church.

What are we to do then while we wait for the task force to do its work? Certainly, we cannot be overcome by inertia. Some organizations may still act as outliers while others work as centrists. Each organization must decide for itself, through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what actions it will take and at what speed it will move.

There is one action that all groups and individuals involved in this struggle can take. To produce the necessary shift toward the inclusive viewpoint, much work needs to be done in Presbyteries and in local congregations. Over the past decade, progressive thinkers in the Presbyterian Church, acting at the General Assembly level, have been able to pass overtures calling for the deletion of G-6.0106b only to have those overtures defeated at the Presbytery level. It is the Presbyterians in the pews who must be convinced that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, called by God, have a right to share their gifts of leadership with the whole church.

To change the minds of ordinary Presbyterians, many of whom have heard the traditional, sin-oriented condemnation of homosexuality promoted by society, media, and religion for most of their lives, we must begin a dialogue that dispels fear and gives people courage to think for themselves. Presbyterians must be persuaded to rethink long held concepts of homosexuality. We do not need a report from the Theological Task Force to begin this work; we need only to follow the task force’s example of sitting down with Presbyterians of differing views, agreeing to listen, ponder, and pray together. The model which Barbara Wheeler is currently using in Albany Presbytery embodies these elements and would be a good place to begin.

Moving a boulder requires unbalanced forces. Those forces can be applied by people pushing on one side of the boulder, by someone throwing a net and rope around the boulder and pulling, or by a combination of those forces. The important thing is that everyone acting upon the boulder move in the same direction.

Becky Lindsay

Becky Lindsay was an alternate commissioner to the 215th G.A. from the Presbytery of Cincinnati, where she has been serving as Chair for the Equipping and Pastoral Care Committee. She operates a private tutoring business where she teaches “various maths and sciences among other subjects.”

Reflections of a Progressive Commissioner

by Ken Smith

The author is Vice President of the Witherspoon Society, and is currently serving as Moderator of the Presbytery of Detroit

The 215th General Assembly in Denver was the tenth assembly I have attended and my second as a commissioner. I enjoy attending GA and joining in the efforts to encourage the assembly to take a progressive stand on the issues before it. I also enjoy the interaction with other attendees, old friends and new, progressive and not so. Being a commissioner limits my opportunity for these social interactions. After my first gig as a commissioner in 1996, I observed that while being a commissioner was an important responsibility, it was a lot more fun to be an observer.

My experience in 2003 was different. This is a gut reaction rather than a reasoned response, but here are a few thoughts. The decision to send Amendment B to the presbyteries in 1996 left me with a much heavier heart than the decision to sidestep sending G-6.0106b to the presbyteries in 2003. My 2003 roommate was a longtime friend (and companion at my first GA). I paced myself better in 2003 and the assembly itself was not as grueling.

There are other differences between being a commissioner and an observer. Observers tend to focus on specific issues while commissioners are called to apply their best thinking and praying to all the issues that come before the assembly; a calling that is more often honored in the breach. Observers can really be neutral on issues on which the commissioners are required to vote. In Columbus in 2002, I was an interested but essentially neutral observer of the vote on biennial assemblies. In 2003, I was assigned to the committee that was charged with implementing biennial assemblies as well as making a recommendation on an overture to reverse last year's action. I could be neutral no longer.

This brings me to what I believe is the most important role of a commissioner:

the opportunity to be a point of influence, first in committee and secondly by speaking on the floor of the assembly. As I noted above, in committee you're assigned a particular set of issues to deal with. I felt I had an obligation to give these issues my best shot. In virtually any set of issues, there are points of justice to address. I also felt an obligation to urge that the process in my committee be as open as possible, trusting that full sharing by all participants would lead to the best decisions.

The opportunity to speak on the floor of the assembly is a more public point of influence. It's not for everyone. (By contrast, I think everyone should speak out in committee.) I decided that the placement of a microphone about six feet from my seat was a call to which I was to respond. I made a minor modification to the committee's recommended action on an overture from my home Presbytery of Detroit, and it passed on a hand vote. My major speech was in favor of sending the removal of G-6.0106b to the presbyteries. I spoke against leaving this to the Theological Task Force and acknowledged that voting on G-6.0106b will cause some pain whichever way it goes, "but we are asked to choose between causing pain for the privileged and for those who are disenfranchised. I think the teaching of scripture is quite clear on this point." It was flattering to be quoted by the GA News (and correctly no less). However, it would be more flattering had it swayed the commissioners.

As a progressive commissioner, I was glad for the support of the progressive observers. The Witherspoon briefings on the issues coming up that evening and the next day were very helpful. (This is more than my bias as a Witherspoon officer.) I think we progressives have come a long way in this effort. In 1996, I got very good briefings on Amendment B but recall hearing little about the other

progressive issues. The Progressive Presbyterian Partnership has really addressed this shortfall, and I trust will continue to do so.

Our process was good. Moderator Susan Andrews not only kept us on schedule (none of my previous nine assemblies came close to following the docket this well) but also showed an excellent sense of timing in knowing when to call on an "orange card" so that a commissioner could move to close debate.

One of the joys of the assembly was working with the other commissioners from the Presbytery of Detroit – eight of us plus a Youth Advisory Delegate. As one of my colleagues wrote after the assembly: "I thought our delegation from the Presbytery of Detroit was exceptional ... it was especially nice that we enjoyed a good esprit de corps among ourselves." I also experienced this good spirit. I was particularly pleased and impressed at how this good spirit was maintained despite our differences on some of the major issues before us.

In many ways this summarizes my experience of GA: good spirit was maintained despite different positions on some of the major issues before us. I was certainly disappointed by some of the votes, but probably less so than if I had been an observer, focusing on certain issues, rather than a commissioner charged with discerning the will of the Holy Spirit for all the actions we took. Although the assembly really failed to step forward on some major issues, it also rejected the opportunity to step backward and adopt more punitive measures against those accused of "defying the constitution." Although I certainly don't think the Theological Task Force should decide the fate of G-6.0106b, I was impressed that here is a group that is learning to trust one another despite strong disagreements. The spirit of this assembly gave a taste of this. Would that the whole church could do the same!

Another commissioner's response:

**“Where are the mystics in our church?
I see plenty of lawyers.
Where are the artists, the dreamers, the lovers?”**

The Rev. David Garnett, minister commissioner to the 215th General Assembly from the Presbytery of East Tennessee, shared with us his report to his presbytery, on the suggestion of friends who thought it should be shared with a wider audience.

He says of himself, “I serve Powell Presbyterian Church, a small church in the suburbs of Knoxville, Tennessee, where I have been a solo pastor for the past 15 years.”

So ... what do you think? Do we need a different ethos in our assemblies? Is such a change possible? What would you do to make it happen? *Please send a note* by e-mail or snail mail to Doug King. You'll find his address and such on the back cover – both inside and outside!

**Minister Commissioner
Report on the 215th PC(USA)
General
Assembly
To The Presbytery of
East Tennessee
June 17, 2003
By
Rev. David Garnett**

In Denver I got the funny feeling that our church has been taken over by lawyers. The majority of the work we did together struck me more as legal work than spiritual work. We spent most of our time poring over carefully worded overtures from the Presbyteries, making changes, proposing amendments, substitute motions, and the like, trying to nail down everything with words. But even as we did that, I was having doubts. Do we really think that everything CAN be nailed down with words? And do we really WANT everything nailed down? What makes us so afraid to leave room for mystery and wonder and

awe? Is this endless yearly wrangling over words really the best use of our time as a national assembly?

The process of nailing everything down with words seemed to me too much like Congress at its worst: too many interest groups overinvested in the process, too much political and parliamentary maneuvering, too many people, of all stripes, trying by their own power and cleverness to remake the church in their own image. You expect the church to be somehow more, purer, above all of that.

For so long now, words, logic, rationality—the life of the mind—have been the strong suit of those in the Reformed tradition (which includes the Presbyterian Church), but now I wonder if we're at this time in our church's history when all that is failing us, if we've reached together the limit of words to effect real change, and that what we need in the church, at least for a while, right now, is something from a different tradition, something beyond words.

I kept wondering in Denver: Where are the mystics in our church? I see plenty of lawyers. Where are the artists, the dreamers, the lovers? I wonder if our time would have been better spent sitting in silence together, praying silently, creating empty spaces, hospitable spaces, where we could make room for each other in all of our differences and passions, giving up that terrible need we all have to some degree to control others instead of love them, and then breaking down into twos and three and fours and telling the Biblical stories and our own stories, and listening to music and poems and dreams, and pondering art, and connecting and networking with one another, sharing our dreams and joining our dreams with others.

I got the feeling that we are really stuck

as a national church in a pattern of behavior that is not serving us well, not moving us forward together. It's a pattern that keeps bringing out our divisive polarities, instead of appealing to a much more important and much more abundant life-giving unity that we share.

I kept wondering what would have happened if we had gathered in Denver, for once, with no agenda, and let the Spirit work on us and lead us in new ways. It would have been awkward, of course, uncomfortable, maybe even chaotic, but I wonder if we're at that point as a church, where something wild and risky needs to happen to break us loose of the death-dealing pattern in which we are stuck.

I did have a fabulous moment, a mystical moment, as I listened to all these different Presbyterians, with all of their different opinions, influenced by all their different personal stories, this vast spectrum that is our church today, and I thought to myself that I really loved all these people and needed them all, and that I couldn't be a Christian in this world without all of them, and that my life would be so much less without them. I sensed that all of them had something of the truth to share that I needed to hear.

But then I had another moment when I thought: how tough it is to be one church. You see it more than ever at General Assembly. We've become this sprawling, big tent of a denomination where all kinds of people find a spiritual home, people with all kinds of different personal histories that dramatically affect their reading of the Bible and of faith and of life, and it's tough to live together with all those differences, to make room for everyone.

But somehow that's what we've got to do, that's what we are called to do, and I suspect that it's going to take something more than spending our time each year trying to nail everything down with words.

A new fundamentalism?

San Diego Presbytery issues “guidelines” for examining candidates

by Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Society Issues Analyst

On June 17 the Presbytery of San Diego adopted a document entitled *Essential Tenets and Reformed Distinctives*. It describes itself as “guidelines for preparing and evaluating candidates through the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, directing [sic!] incoming ministers through the Committee on Ministry and the Presbytery of San Diego, and educating and training.” Within a few days it was posted on Presbyweb and attracted attention throughout the church.

Any reflective reader of the document is likely to raise several questions: Why did you do it at all? Why did you pick out these themes? Why do you phrase these as you do? And why do you frame it primarily in terms of exclusions?

The document came out of the presbytery’s committees on Ministry and Preparation for Ministry; apparently the chief drafters were the Rev. Kirk Bottomly of Fallbrook and the Rev. Mark Slomka of La Jolla, both pastors of “confessing” congregations. According to the introduction it grew out of a number of actual situations in which these committees did not want to disappoint a candidate for ministry or a congregation that had just called a pastor, even though there were misgivings about the person’s views. These committees are characterized as “the primary credentialing committees of our presbytery,” delegated by the presbytery to perform a “gatekeeping function.” They felt a need, therefore, for a summary of “essentials” or “theological non-negotiables,” not only for making judgments at the point of examining ministerial candidates but in giving helpful advice to potential elders about what it means to be Presbyterian. Thus it is described as a “tool for instructing our congregations,” as a “reference for training our prospective church officers,” and as “guidelines” for preparing and evaluating candidates.

There is a broader context, of course. The document picks up the recent slogan that “theology matters,” repeats the judgment that “we are in the midst of a theological crisis,” and declares that the church is ordaining people who “do not know or believe the essential tenets expressed in our confessions.” Both the framework and the content indicate that it comes down on one side of a current controversy, in the course of which we have already seen witch hunts being conducted, individuals being targeted, and judgments being made on the basis of overly simple stereotypes. Paul Rolf Jensen, having filed charges against nearly two dozen Presbyterians over issues of sexuality, has now broadened his strategy to filing accusations of heresy that would prevent a minister’s transfer to another presbytery.

The drafters were aware of treading on contested ground. While anyone being ordained must “sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith,” the Presbyterian church

has resolutely refused to specify what those “essential tenets” are. They knew that they might be accused of insisting on strict “subscription” to their statement, and they deny any such intent; the document declares that it is not intended to be a “strict formulation” and “has no authority in itself” but only offers “guidelines” which a committee may use “at its discretion” in assessing a candidate. Since the principal purpose of the document is to be “helpful” in training, educating, and guiding, they acknowledge that it could be misused as a “blunt and inappropriate instrument” in situations that require sensitivity and compassion rather than harsh judgment.

Yet they also quote a statement in the classic principles of church order (G-1.0302), adding their own interpretation of it: “Every Christian church, or union or association of particular churches [such as the Presbytery of San Diego] [emphasis in the original], is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members.” Here the Presbytery of San Diego appears to be claiming for itself the powers assigned to the constitution of the PC(USA).

The body of the document has three parts: six “essential tenets,” seven “Reformed distinctives” (the use of this word as a noun seems to be a “distinctive” of the evangelical subculture), and “questions for examination,” inviting candidates to “look over them so that we may have a conversation about them.”

“Essential Tenets”

The “essential tenets” include the authority of Scripture, God, humanity’s original righteousness and fall into sin, Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the eternal Word, his atoning work, and salvation by grace through faith. Under each heading there is a summary statement, backed up with citations of Scripture and the confessions, and then a declaration (often appropriating the stirring language of the Barmen Declaration) of “what is not affirmed.” This, of course, is the basis on which positions will be judged to be off base.

Frequently a doctrinal perspective is phrased in such pejorative language that it seems to condemn itself, when in fact it may not be a “position” so much as an open question that deserves, in the declared spirit of this document, serious consideration and careful formulation. That kind of wording makes it all too easy to “pin” a candidate as holding a doctrine that “attempts to subordinate biblical authority to any human authority, cultural norm, or ideology,” “distorts the gospel message or holds it captive to culture,” or “elevates sociology, psychology, education or any other discipline above the clear witness of Scripture.”

Statements like these seem to ignore the confessions’ own

awareness of the need to *interpret* Scripture, to say nothing of doctrine. Even the 16th-century Second Helvetic says we must consider the language used, the circumstances, and the need to interpret everything with the “rule of faith and love” (C-5,010). The Scots Confession similarly says, “We dare not receive or admit any interpretation which is contrary to any principal point of our faith, or to any other plain text of Scripture, or to the rule of love” (C-3.18). The Confession of 1967 is even more explicit about the influence of “views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current” (C-9.29).

One would hope that these perspectives of the confessions are not being dismissed as distorting the message of the Bible. In some circles, that seems to be exactly how they are viewed. A recent article by John H. Adams (*The Layman Online*, February 24, 2003) opposed any notion that Scripture is “culturally biased” or that its interpretation can be “culturally shaped.” He objected, furthermore, that our Book of Confessions offers Presbyterians a “multiple choice” approach to major issues, and he contrasts it unfavorably with the Westminster Confession. This is the same tune that was sung in 1965 when the Lay Committee was formed in

Some background

Several books deal with the controversy during the Twenties: Loetscher’s *The Broadening Church*, Longfield’s *The Presbyterian Controversy*, and Weston’s *Presbyterian Pluralism*.

The movement called fundamentalism grew out of the Niagara Conference (1895). A series of twelve tracts, entitled *The Fundamentals*, was published between 1910 and 1915. A set of five points — biblical inerrancy, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, physical resurrection, and miracles — was adopted by the General Assemblies of the PCUSA in 1910, 1916, and 1923 as “essential and necessary articles of faith.” These are the *Presbyterian* fundamentals, slightly different from the list sometimes given for the movement as a whole.

In response, the Auburn Affirmation was signed by 1,274 ministers (1924), opposing the elevation of these doctrines “to the position of tests for ordination or for good standing in our church” and noting the Presbyterian tradition of accepting theological differences, subordinating them to loyalty to Jesus Christ and work for the reign of God.

In 1924 the voices of moderation came to the fore. The Swearingen Commission, appointed in 1925, was made up of moderates, loyal to the constitution of the church. It reported in both 1926 and 1927, and its recommendations were approved overwhelmingly by these General Assemblies. Their main points were that procedures must be followed, that the Assembly has no power to add ordination requirements beyond those spelled out in the Book of Order, that the presbytery is the ordaining body, that it is inappropriate to insist on exact formulations, and that there is a place for toleration and diversity.

Members of the Commission and other participants in the controversy were well aware of the historical background —

- the insistence on strict subscription in the Church of Scotland (with even the addition of further propositions);
- the more flexible tradition of England and New England, which had gone through the experiences of Revolution and Restoration and Toleration;

- the Adopting Act of 1729, which called on ordinands to assent to the “essential and necessary” doctrines of the Westminster Confession and the catechisms, as “good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine,” but permitted them to state their “scruples” and left it to the presbytery to judge whether these were within legitimate bounds, not affecting “essential and necessary” articles of doctrine, worship, or government; and

- the terms of the reunion agreements between the Old Side and New Side in 1758, between the Old School and the New School in 1869-70, and the union with the Cumberland Presbyterians in 1903-6.

The habit of adding requirements for ordination is an old one — and a contested one. Anyone acquainted with Scottish history will have vague memories about the Auchterarder Presbytery, which added its own propositions as requirements for ordination and was rebuked by the General Assembly in 1717; the elevation of the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* to magisterial status; and the secession of Erskine and the Associate Presbytery. This was a path that American Presbyterians tried to avoid from the start, although two Pennsylvania presbyteries soon violated the Adopting Act by requiring strict subscription.

Those who opposed strict subscription, and opposed even more the adding of codicils beyond what the Westminster Confession said, pointed out in the eighteenth century that the demand is being made to subscribe not to Scripture but to a particular interpretation of Scripture, making the latter the object of assent and not letting it point beyond itself.

The tension in the PC(USA) today is the heritage of three hundred and more years, and it is largely a tension between the English and the Scottish styles. What scares even historians is the persistence of these traditional styles, still reflected in the voting patterns of the presbyteries in recent years. New England, New York, and the Midwest inherited the English tradition. Pennsylvania and the South were more influenced by the Scottish tradition, which involved not only subscription but the mentality of the National League and Covenant, which in the U.S. led to various attempts to “Christianize” a government that had adopted the First Amendment and forbidden any religious test for office holders.

order to fight C-67 and the whole Book of Confessions. Contempt is still being poured on the confessions of the PC(USA) and the fullness of their teachings.

The positions condemned in the San Diego document include these: that the Scriptures “contain the Word of God but are not in themselves the Word of God” (compare C-9.27, which says that the Spirit “bears unique and authoritative witness *through* the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed *as* the Word of God written”); identification of God as a “goddess” (we know where this comes from, but is the implication that God is a “male god?”); the notion “that sin is part of [God’s] original plan to educate and improve humankind” (compare C-6.014-021, which was worded quite intentionally by the Westminster Assembly to permit supralapsarianism — a position advocated more recently

The word “essential” means indispensable, constitutive, defining, in contrast with what is incidental or variable. To what is this contrast being applied? An essential might be a doctrine more “central” than others. Or it could mean some kind of “distilled essence” extracted from the whole body of doctrine. Or it could mean the basic message as contrasted with the diverse ways it is understood and verbalized.

I think that the latter is closest to the mark. In the Form of Government the term is used in the context of affirming freedom of conscience and differences in the interpretation of Scripture (G-6.0108): these are to be respected as long as there is not “serious departure” from “the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in the Book of Confessions and the Form of Government” (subsection a); and responsibility to make this judgment rests initially on the person involved and ultimately on the governing body (subsection b).

Historians often list the chief emphases of Reformed theology: God alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone. But these are general affirmations, not precise formulations. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., from 1788 on, used to ask ordinands whether they affirmed the Westminster Confession as “containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.” It is interesting, however, that the Westminster Confession itself uses the language of “the whole counsel of God” (C-6.006) as communicated through Scripture; while this involves theoretical assertions about God and Christ, it is focused on the good news of salvation and renewal. A very good formulation of “the whole counsel of God,” stated as gospel rather than law, and in practical rather than theoretical language, is found in the third chapter of the Form of Government (G-3.0100-0401), a passage designed to set the context and purpose of church government. This is also the tone of the Confession of 1967 and the Brief Statement adopted in 1991.

by Reformed theologians as varied as Schleiermacher and Barth, who hold that God condemns for the sake of saving).

There is repeated insistence that biblical narratives, especially of the miracles, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, are “historically true” and also that these events are “supernatural.” The meaning of the latter term shifts considerably, moving well beyond either the literal meaning of sentences or empirical confirmation of those sentences, for the document itself speaks of the “supernatural reality and power of the kingdom of God,” suggests that Christians “experience a supernatural dimension to their life,” and asserts that the sacraments involve “a supernatural presence” and “supernaturally perform what they signify,” though it denies that the sacraments “confer grace whether or not they are received in faith.”

There is much concern that “atonement, substitutionary sacrifice, expiation for sins on the basis of Christ’s death” might be rejected as “obsolete, unworthy, unessential, or irrelevant,” or that language about his “substitutionary death” in taking on the “curse” for sin might be considered “primitive, barbaric, violent, and unworthy of God.” Such language seems to foreclose reflection on a complex topic. It is in fact moderated by a passage very similar to one in the Confession of 1967 (C-9.09), though it is not cited, to the effect that salvation is described using various kinds of language.

Finally, there is repeated insistence that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator and source of salvation, without acknowledgment of many questions, raised by the confessions themselves, concerning the scope of salvation and how it is mediated to those outside the sphere of Christian proclamation (C-3.04, C-5.086-092, C-6.066, 6.192C-9.31).

“Reformed Distinctives”

The “Reformed distinctives” offer some relief from this dogmatic atmosphere, probably because they are framed in language that is proclamatory and pastoral, practical rather than theoretical, and in this sense more in the spirit of Calvin and Barth, to name only two principal (though “subordinate”) authorities in the Reformed tradition. The seven distinctives are election for salvation and service, covenant and covenant life, the sacraments, sanctification and the work of the Holy Spirit, the priesthood of all believers, the mission of the church, and stewardship.

Several aspects of the Book of Confessions seem, however, to be missing, even in this proclamatory and practical context.

The classic confessions had a section on “the civil magistrate” (C-3.24, C-5.252-260, C-6.127-130), though they were written in an age quite different from our own, raising as many questions as they answer. The Confession of 1967 has much to say about “reconciliation in society” (C-9.43-47), and the Brief Statement, citing Scripture and the earlier confessions, mentions Jesus’ relationships with the powers of his time (C-10.2), condemns the way we “accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care” (C-10.3), and

calls on us “to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace” (C-10.4).

The Confession of 1967, following in the spirit of earlier confessions (especially the Barmen Declaration!) warns against religion, including Christian religion, as perhaps the chief instance of human pride (self-centeredness, self-justification, patriarchy, racism, Eurocentrism — the list can go on and on), which is corrected repeatedly by the reconciling word of the gospel and often benefiting from the insights of non-Christians (C-9.41-42; cf. also C-9.12-13).

The same confession, building on an older Reformation tradition about the way the gospel is to be proclaimed, warns against the church’s inclination to over-identify the gospel with any nation, any way of life, any class, any finite reality. It makes four strong points in the section on “Reconciliation in Society” (I use the inclusive language version):

- “Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize others, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess” (C-9.44);
- “. . . the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling” (C-9.45);
- “A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God” (C-9.46);
- “The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by society when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time” (9.47).

Precisely in connection with proclamation of the gospel we are called to do more than make judgments of orthodoxy.

Questions for Examination

This section is commended to examiners and examinees as points for “conversation.” The six essentials and seven distinctives are briefly summarized and pointed questions are asked, with the same emphases as before.

Perhaps the chief value of this section is as a study guide for those going into ordination examinations, either the written ones read by the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee or the oral ones before the presbytery. It will doubtless function much like the “crib notes” that circulate among seminarians as they look ahead to these examinations. It is helpful in raising a number of topics — for “conversation,” if the document’s self-characterization is in fact followed. One would hope, then, that examinees will not feel

obliged to repeat the formulations they find here, and that examiners will not use the document as a litmus test by which to condemn those who cannot in sincerity use these formulations but are prepared to offer additional perspectives and alternative language.

We can expect this document to be adapted and adopted by other presbyteries. At best it can be a discussion-starter. It is not unrealistic, however, to fear that it will be used precisely as a “blunt instrument” to condemn those who fail to use the shibboleths that prevail in some circles but are by no means an adequate expression of the Reformed faith and its confessions. If it should be used as a Procrustean bed to trim ordinands to its dimensions, there will be every reason for filing judicial complaints about the document and those who implement it.

THE POSITIVE SIDE OF LIFE

Living on Earth is expensive,
but it does include a free trip around the sun every year.

How long a minute is
depends on what side of the bathroom door you’re on.

Birthdays are good for you;
the more you have, the longer you live.

Happiness comes through doors you didn’t even know you left open.

Ever notice that the people who are late
are often much jollier than the people who have to wait for them?

Most of us go to our grave with our music still inside of us.

Walmart is lowering prices every day,
how come nothing is free yet?

You may be only one person in the world,
but you may also be the world to one person.

Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.

We could learn a lot from crayons:
some are sharp, some are pretty,
some are dull, some have weird names,
and all are different colors....
but they all exist very nicely in the same box.

A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on
a detour.

Thanks to Bill Knox

Thinkin' 'bout the Government

Douglas F. Ottati, Professor of Theology, Union Seminary/PSCE

Afganistan, Iraq, and the war on terrorism. Intimations of an American empire. Federal tax cuts, rising deficits, state and city budget crises. A modest French force sent into the Congo by the U.N. Gay marriages in Canada. Supreme Court decisions supporting some forms of affirmative action in university admissions and promoting dignity and respect for the private sexual behavior of gays and lesbians. A Medicare prescription drug benefit? Israeli troops withdrawing from Gaza. Calls for the United States and others to halt years of slaughter in Liberia. Seems like a good time to ponder the role of nations and governments.

Presbyterian liberals are pretty good on the importance of government and courts of law for upholding justice and civil rights. (Keep an eye on Attorney General Ashcroft.) We're also O. K. on the need for at least some government programs and services to promote the public good. But we tend to 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.)

Our theological heritage may help to sharpen our reflections. The doctrine of creation encourages us to affirm that humans are social creatures who need institutions to maintain order and direct cooperative enterprises. The doctrine of sin indicates that we need governments to restrain the inordinate interests and destructive actions of both persons and groups. It also suggests that the concentrations of power which governments require in order to undertake these functions often invite dangerous abuses.

Statements in our confessions add some

important details. Westminster has a chapter on "civil magistrates" or government officials. It says they are ordained to be under God and over the people for the public good, and that they are armed with the power of the sword to defend good and restrain evil. It also says that magistrates are charged to maintain piety, justice, and peace, and to "wage war upon just and necessary occasions" (BOC 6.127-8). (Portions of the chapter were later revised by Presbyterians in America to reflect the official disestablishment of religion here as well as tolerance for a plurality of churches.) The Scots Confession of 1560 claims that God ordains civil powers and authorities "for the manifestation of his own glory and the well being of all men." It says that civil authorities must therefore be obeyed rather than resisted, so long as they act in their own spheres and vigilantly fulfill their office (BOC 3.24). The Theological Declaration of Barmen says that "in the as yet unredeemed world . . . the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace," and that it undertakes this task "by means of the threat and exercise of force." At the same time, Barmen also rejects "the false doctrine" that "the State, over and above its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life" (BOC 8.22-3). The Confession of 1967 rather famously claims that "the search for cooperation and peace . . . requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding" (BOC 9.45).

In general, Presbyterian theological tradition encourages us to engage questions of justice and the public good. It regards government as service and jurisprudence as high callings, and it resists privatized spiritualities that leave politics out of account. Those of us who are informed by this heritage will not be surprised at continuing needs for humanitarian mili-

tary actions to restrain violence and to police political settlements – e.g., Bosnia, the Congo, Liberia – although we should also expand traditional horizons to take account of representative international assemblies and their authority. We will not be surprised that nations, including our own, sometimes resort to war in order to address significant threats. But we should be inclined to encourage vigorous public discussion and debate as to whether one or another threat is sufficiently imminent and severe to justify the use of military force. An inclination that will only be strengthened if we consider the abuses to which a lone superpower may well be tempted.

The insistence on justice will lead some of us to appreciate the need for government to check corporate power and greed (remember Enron), but also to question our government's recent detention of immigrants and foreign nationals. Together with an insistence that government provide for the well being of persons, the standard of justice also relates directly to questions of diversity and fair access to the substantial good of higher education, as well as the respect and life-options our society offers to lesbian women and gay men. The question of taxation should lead us to ponder appropriate levels of government responsibility for alleviating poverty, providing for the common defense, and subsidizing education, health care, transportation, etc. It may also encourage us to ask just how much power and how many resources should be concentrated in government offices and authorities.

When I was growing up in New Jersey, I used to put red, white, and blue crepe paper in the spokes of my bicycle on the Fourth of July. In the evening, we went down to the Roosevelt Commons to see a fireworks display put on by the Tenafly Police Department. It was great, and I still like to celebrate on the Fourth. Only now, I also think it's a good time to pause and reflect on the nation and the role of government altogether. If you didn't get a chance to do that this past July, don't worry. There's still plenty of time and lots to think about.



“‘Change’ Ministries” – some psychological and theological insights

Dr. Jennifer Stone

During the 215th General Assembly, the “Three Sisters” – More Light Presbyterians, That All May Freely Serve and the Shower of Stoles Project – sponsored an educational luncheon as they did in 2002. This year the focus was on the topic “Gay to Straight: Bad Theology, Bad Medicine.”

One of the panelists was Dr. Jennifer Stone, who holds an M.Div. Degree and a Ph.D., and is currently serving as a counselor in Memphis, Tennessee. She is also a new at-large member of the Witherspoon Society Executive Committee.

Her presentation focused on “the perceptual processes by which groups marginalized often get increasingly marginalized, even demonized, by dominant cultures.” She believes her views are relevant not just to issues of “gay to straight” change ‘ministries,’ but to marginalized groups in general.

Here are a few excerpts from her talk.

...

First, let me acknowledge that for many people, when they talk about gay people, unfortunately they believe they are already talking about sex. Thus, for you who are gay if you express the pain you feel from mistreatment, or attempt to be in a “genuine” community for people to “know you,” this is experienced by many as “inflicting your ‘sexuality’ on them.” You may have noticed how it feels to be considered a walking “sex object,” by which your mere presence is viewed as an infringement of good “living room” manners, let alone “church manners.” No wonder so many gay people accept this message and try to disappear – into a closet, into another “orientation,” or into death. How many times have we heard even well meaning people at this assembly refer to the committees dealing with the ordination of gay persons as the “sex” committees?

As a gay person at times you are given the message that your presence itself is inappropriate and “out of place,” furthermore that for many your very presence is a sleazy, polluting, contagious impurity. So understandably many gay people take the next step to believe they are “bad” or at least that their wish for relational closeness is bad. Gay people are told in all kinds of messages that they are persons from whom children, churches, holy

places, and certainly the pulpits should be protected.

For the fact of course is, that when we talk about gay people we are no more talking about sex than when we talk about straight people. So how could it have possibly come about that gay people are seen so differently? I suspect it has to do with the habit of dominant viewpoints. For me, logs and specks come to mind. But so also does Jung’s idea of the “shadow.” Various psychological ideas suggest that what dominant groups often see is not just a speck in the eye of another, but the “projection” of the log in one’s own eye ... into the eye of another. Beauty is not the only thing in the eye of the beholder! Projection is a disowning of unacknowledged aspects of oneself; in a sense it is the opposite of confession: putting one’s confession on the other and then attacking it. I suspect you have noticed lot of “straight” people, a lot of people, have issues about sex. And those disowned concerns about sexuality are easy ones to “project.”

So when we find our culture starting with the question regarding gay people – well, can you change?” or “why aren’t you ‘straight’?” – we have probably already gone about five turns too many without examining our assumptions. The questions of “why are people gay?” or “can’t

you change?” are not appropriate starting places! Since we are specifically discussing gay people’s sexuality today, then let’s acknowledge some of the steps of consideration we have skipped. If we haven’t noticed already the previous assumptions through which we have arrived at this question, then let’s commit at some point to notice and examine the turns we, or at least some, have already made to get to this question.

...

First, some major points:

- 1) In the view of many, our having to deal with today’s concerns at all is viewed as the fault of gay people, for “bringing these concerns up.”
- 2) It is not hard to get someone who is actually a bisexual person to be a bisexual person. (More on that in a minute.)
- 3) Regarding their sexual attraction, humans come in more than two categories.
- 4) If you tell people that they are bad or sleazy often enough, unfortunately, most people will tend to believe it.
- 5) Practitioners and ministers should be clear to themselves and clear with the persons with whom they are coming into contact as to whether they understand themselves to be doing “psychotherapy” or “faith healing.” In either case their practice should conform to any relevant professional and ethical standards.
- 6) The first professional guideline for all health professions is to “do no harm.”
- 7) Regarding today’s topics, most gay people in many regards are already “experts.”

They/you/I have been “treasuring these questions up in their hearts” for a long time. It is not a new idea for most gay people to consider what behavior God wants from them regarding their relationships. Or how they fit into the spectrum of relationships regarding gender. It is often more recently that straight people have begun to consider deeply all aspects of

their own sexuality, let alone their attitudes toward gay people. When negative stereotypes are sent toward a person, it is adaptive for that person to do a great deal of psychic and spiritual “work” in dealing with those stereotypes in order to survive in a healthy way. If you don’t believe this just ask African-Americans, Latinas and Latinos, the poor, those wheelchair bound, and the list could go on and on ... to include so many minority and frequently marginalized people.

Now to further elaborate my points:

I would suggest to you not only that some of these attitudes toward gay people are based in society’s fear of reflecting on its own sexuality, but that at the core these “value” issues reflect concerns of gender and power. That is, if we have attached our sense of identity or sense of security to power and gender assumptions about the world then any alternate maps will feel threatening to our personal sense of power and our sense of security. And if our “image” of God is intertwined with our power and gender maps, then it will feel to us as if God also has been assaulted. I use the word “image” here very intentionally. I am not referring to the flowing energy of God, impossible to pin down; I am referring to the possibly limited graven mental images of God that humans tend to make and then may worship instead of God. This process in defense of our concretized “images” may explain not only much of the emotional heat many people feel in their first year of seminary, but also some of the reactions you will see at this assembly, either overt or covert.

...

Things aren’t as simple as a person being either gay or straight. All the major research studies say that sexual attraction is on a continuum. Human research indicates that some people are attracted only to men or to women, but that most people have some attraction to both genders, most having more attraction to one gender than another. This self-report is not typically shouted from rooftops, but under confidential conditions has been reported consistently.

Thus, it is not hard to have a “bisexual” person appear “changed” to a straight person. The word to note here is “appear.” Since Grecian times we have tended to think in dichotomies and this worldview seemingly tends to “clarify” and yet also oversimplifies, even distorts, our perceptions of the world. This “twosome” thinking as well often leads us to think in terms of “gay” or “straight” and to forget that “bisexuals” exist. So, when a bisexual is mislabeled as “gay” it may appear that that person’s attraction was changed – when the range of people to whom he or she is attracted changed not at all. ... Neither are there only three categories of persons or orientations, or only a one-dimensional line of realities regarding sexual attraction, let alone sexual identity. There exist, including in this room, some who are transgender persons. ... But it is important to acknowledge these persons, for all persons have lives, spirits, and need to be “seen” for who they are, rather than seen as marginal because they are “too different to count.” This suggests the pain that can be caused when we look for people to fit our pre-existing “images,” and then “fix” people, rather than discern each person’s distinct, God-given, reality. Each different human perspective has something special to offer us if we really aspire to appreciate God’s “gifts differing.” ... And if we have the patience and the faith to “see.”...

Perhaps the false images placed onto gay people are, in this case, a “demon” with which we have to wrestle before we get our blessing. You will hear many straight people too, who feel they obtained a blessing from wrestling along with us against these “demons” of false, hurtful, labeling. May ours be a blessing that we can share more widely, and that can be shared even among privileged straight people who now don’t want to know about us, and who still want to “change” us. May they too learn to treasure us, and may we all learn to treasure each other.



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. 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

Kent Winters-Hazelton
1228 Shepherd Lane
Claremont, CA 91711

Phone (909) 392-8301

E-mail: kwinhazel@aol.com

The Society thanks you!

Review

A Work of Hospitality: The Open Door Reader 1982-2002

Edited by Peter R. Gathje, 2002. Published by The Open Door Community, Atlanta, GA

Review by Don Beisswenger, Professor of Church and Community, Emeritus, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Don has spent time each year at the Open Door during summers and sabbaticals while at Vanderbilt, and has helped develop a ministry with the homeless in Nashville, including the Power Project, which is organizing the homeless for political action.

“We are an experiment with truth. We make the road by walking.” Murphy Davis

“Man cannot live by cornbread alone.” Willie Dee Wimberly

In this publication we are gifted with 20 years of reflection on the life and mission of a remarkable community: The Open Door in Atlanta. The passion and vitality of the community becomes a “Word” for us all. I have learned much from these folk over many years. This selection of some 90 articles, published over the years in their newsletter, *Hospitality*, derives from lives and community shaped by living in proximity with the homeless and the imprisoned, people seen by our culture as expendable. Deep wisdom about God is revealed for us through such situations.

The Open Door is an intentional Christian community, a community seeking to be shaped by the Gospel of God’s love and justice. The community is remarkably diverse in educational background, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and experience – a diversity seldom evident in most Christian communities about which I am aware. The mission takes form in regular occasions for table fellowship with persons from the streets and regular visits for families with persons in prison. The invisible punishments when persons get released from prison become evident as well: disenfranchisement, disqualification from public housing, welfare benefits, and job training. The community’s mission is to seek just public space, such as toilets for homeless people where they can pee for free with dignity. Recently they, along with a coalition, engaged the governing powers regarding adequate medical care for all God’s people. The festival of shelters will occur in September. Feisty readings about all this will be found in the book.

The six sections of the book deal first with the time of “settling in,” where the interplay of convictions, life in community and a common mission were hammered out. The next two sections

describe the work of hospitality with the homeless and the imprisoned. Christ, they believe, comes to the Open Door as a homeless person or one on death row. Homelessness is described as hell, and prison as slavery. The sacraments of hospitality are outlined in section five. Worship shapes their life together and life together shapes the liturgy. The liturgy gives respite from the journey as well as reshaping of their call. The next section contains stories of “saints” who have shared the journey; Willie D., Carl Barker, Sherman. The final section focuses on theological understandings which have emerged from their life in community, and from their living with the homeless and the prisoner.

The reader will see creative tension between convictions, a mission which keeps getting reshaped, and structures by which it is embodied in personal and social life. But all thought and action is shaped within the crucible of life with the poor and those in prison.

Each article is about two or three pages, and together they illumine a host of vital issues of life in community, advocacy in medical care for the homeless, and justice for those on death row.

I commend this set of readings. Each is a gem. I am reading one article each day as a part of my morning reflection. They help me close the distance, to keep close to issues facing the poor during this dirty rotten time. This book gives us the great gift of seeing *proximity* as a key spiritual discipline of our time

The global economy and the idolatry of efficiency seem to determine everything. It is totalitarianism of the market, Dorothy Sölle says. To achieve freedom we have to think out of character and thus the ancient vision is kindled again. At the heart of the resistance is a wonderfully simple statement. Sölle says, “The world is not for sale. Life on this earth that God loves is not for sale.” These readings embody her vision.

Thank you again to the Open Door.

Got comments??

If you have thoughts about our statements on the defeat of the Des Moines Overture (page 14) or on the dismissal of the Rev. Steve Van Kuiken (page 29), we’d like to hear them! Just send an e-mail or a note to Doug King. His address and all that are on the inside back cover.

A Calendar for Progressive Presbyterians

We present here information about any events we've heard about that might be of interest to progressives in the Presbyterian tradition.

If you have events to add, please contact

Doug King
1418 Clarendon Drive
Wayzata, MN 55391-2103
Phone (952) 473-2711
FAX: (952) 472-2716
E-mail: dougking2@aol.com

This calendar is also on the Witherspoon website, where it is updated frequently. (Just go to www.witherspoonsociety.org/coming_events.htm) There you will find links to the sites that will provide more information on many of these events.

2003

Aug. 4 - 10 — Ghost Ranch seminar on A Biblical Vision for the Future.

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

Check the Ghost Ranch catalog or go on-line to www.ghost ranch.org/seminar_data/fall.php

August 14 - 17 — WOW2003: God's Deliverance Is For All — a gathering of sexually and gender diverse Christians from the U.S. and Canada. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. For more information see next column.

Sept. 11-14 - Voices of Sophia 2003 Gathering in Louisville, KY. The theme: Racism, Whiteness and Resistance. Materials will be available soon for local organizing to prepare in advance for this Gathering. Check out the website at <http://www.voicesof sophia.org/Home.html>

Nov. 6-8 — Covenant Network Conference at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC. Theme: "The Church We Are Called to Be and to Become." See next column for more details.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO REGISTER FOR WOW 2003 WITNESS OUR WELCOME!

WOW 2003 is the largest Christian gathering of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight persons from Canada and United States.

The largest Christian event ever to focus on welcoming people of all sexual orientations will be held August 14 through August 17, 2003 at the University of Pennsylvania. Witness Our Welcome is an ecumenical gathering of sexually diverse and gender inclusive Christians from Canada and the U.S. which supports the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight persons in congregations and ministries, mostly within the tradition of mainline Protestant churches.

The theme for WOW 2003 is **God's Deliverance is for ALL!**

For more information on WOW2003, visit our web site at www.wow2k.org or call toll free 1-866-550-3500.

Got events to add?

Please send them to dougking2@aol.com or
Doug King
1418 Clarendon Drive
Wayzata, MN 55391-2103

The 2003 Covenant Conference

The Church We Are Called to Be and to Become

November 6 - 8, 2003

New York Avenue Presbyterian Church Washington, DC

Plenary speakers:

- Keynote: **Barbara Wheeler**, President of Auburn Theological Seminary in New York, in dialogue with
 - **Richard Mouw**, President of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena.
- Also --
- **Bruce Reyes-Chow**, Organizing Pastor of Mission Bay Community Church in San Francisco, and
 - **Patrick Henry**, Executive Director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, MN.

Preachers include:

- **Jana Childers**, Dean and Professor of Homiletics at San Francisco Theological Seminary
- **Chris Glaser**, author, activist, and popular retreat leader
- **Ken Kovacs**, Pastor of Catonsville [MD] Presbyterian Church
- **J. Barrie Shepherd**, poet and pastor, recently retired from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York

For more information go to the Covenant Network website, at <http://www.covenantnetwork.org/covconf03c.html>

Witherspoon News

The annual Witherspoon Society awards

(see photos on pages 11 and 30)

Kent Winters-Hazelton, Witherspoon president, reports on our presence at the General Assembly

This year, as always, Witherspoon was well represented at the General Assembly. Many faithful members were present throughout the week and in support of the various programs sponsored by the Society, including a great and challenging address by Dirk Ficca, of the Parliament of World Religions, and warm appreciation for former Moderator Jack Rogers.

Two of our board members, Ken Smith and Trina Zelle, served as commissioners, while Gene TeSelle and Jake Young were liaisons to the International Issues and Catholicity committees, respectively. Doug King again brought the news of the Assembly to us with valued perspective. Vicki Harris staffed our booth, ably assisted by Hannah Webster along with Jane Hannah and her husband Frank. Our Wareham intern, Lucy Harris, offered a powerful personal testimony to the Church Orders Committee about the impact of G-6.0106b on ministers seeking calls. Ray and Betty Kersting received our volunteer of the year award for their varied and essential service on behalf of Witherspoon. Jill Acree and José Olagues were involved in support of all our activities, as were our newest board members, Jenny Stone and Kate Van Brocklin.

My thanks to all for their excellent work.

The Witherspoon Society
presents the
Whole Gospel
Congregation Award
to the
**Igreja Presbiteriana Unida do Brasil
(IPU)**
in grateful recognition of
its witness to
the gospel of reconciliation
in the face of
dictatorship and inquisition
May 25, 2003

The Witherspoon Society
presents its
Volunteer of the Year Award
to
Ray and Betty Kersting
In grateful recognition of
their lifetime of advocacy and service
and
their faithful achievements as
Membership Coordinators
and
General Assembly Schedulers
extraordinaires
May 27, 2003

The Witherspoon Society
presents the
Andrew Murray Award
to
Jack B. Rogers
in grateful recognition of his
building of bridges
and his
testimony to the fullness
of our confessions
May 27, 2003

Vicki Moss (left)
supervises the
Witherspoon
booth, assisted by
Hannah Webster
(center).
Witherspoon intern
Lucy Harris stops
by for a visit.



Two progressive congregations are currently seeking pastors for very interesting ministries

B'more in Baltimore

An amazing and unique opportunity for the right person to serve simultaneously as a half-time pastor at one PC(USA) church and a half-time associate pastor at a separate, nearby PC(USA) church, both of which pursue intensive urban ministry in downtown Baltimore.

At the one, lead a small congregation committed to addressing inner-city issues. At the other, receive strong mentorship while focusing on educational programs. The sky's the limit for preaching prophetically and teaching comprehensively, while boosting community involvement and congregational growth.

Both congregations share inclusive core values, are affirming churches and are working to complement each other's work in the urban core. You must be energetic, innovative and flexible. Also, you should enjoy city life and have a great sense of humor.

Individual CIFs are available at www.lightstreetchurch.org and www.firstfranklin.org.

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City, is seeking an Associate Pastor for Young Adult & Youth Ministries.

To contact the committee with questions or to send a Personal Information Form (The PIF), please e-mail: apnc@fapc.org, or mail to: Associate Pastor Nominating Committee, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Seven West 55th Street, New York, NY 10019, and please mark CONFIDENTIAL.

You'll find more information at their church website <http://www.fapc.org/>, and especially on the page for the associate pastor search, which includes their CIF – <http://www.fapc.org/whoweare/>

Witherspoon Society comments ...

on Cincinnati Presbytery action to remove the Rev. Steve Van Kuiken from the ministry

The Witherspoon Society expresses its concern at the action by the Presbytery of Cincinnati to remove the Rev. Steve Van Kuiken as pastor of the Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church. We further express our concern for Mr. Van Kuiken, his family and the members of Mt. Auburn Church. Steve Van Kuiken has been faithful in carrying out his call as pastor to the members and friends of the Mt. Auburn Church. In performing his pastoral role, he has reflected Mt. Auburn's strong commitment to support of and care for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people of Cincinnati. His pastoral care has included his performing marriages which reflect the covenantal commitment of two people. In his performance of this ancient Christian ritual, he has supported the loving, faithful relationships being affirmed by couples, whether they are of the same or different genders.

We recognize that the Presbytery has acted in an effort to deal with a very complex situation, and has had to consider the needs of the Mt. Auburn congregation, external pressures from further threatened judicial actions, and much more that is beyond our knowledge. Nevertheless, this action seems to raise serious issues for the Presbyterian Church as a whole:

- Our church's judicial system provides for careful review of decisions taken at the presbytery level. The presbytery acted on the basis of a decision rendered by its own Permanent Judicial Commission, while that decision is still subject to appeal.
- Our church's policies regarding sexuality and marriage are still being considered and debated. The 215th General Assembly kept the discussion open by asserting that those issues remain to be considered by the special Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church.
- Our Book of Order affirms strong respect for personal conscience and for the call to mutual forbearance.

The action of the Presbytery of Cincinnati seems to ignore these virtues of our Presbyterian way of dealing with difficult issues, by imposing with undue haste the ultimate sanction of removal from ministry.

We hope that those who seek to exacerbate the situation by their threats will allow the church courts to do their work for the well-being of all those involved.

Our hope and prayer is that ways will be found to mitigate this serious threat to the peace, unity, and purity of our church. In the 1950s, the Presbytery of Cincinnati removed the Rev. Maurice McCracken from the ministry because of his refusal to pay taxes in protest of U.S. militarism. In the 1990s the Presbytery had the good grace to reverse that action. May understanding bring change more quickly this time.

Glimpses of the General Assembly



The Rev. Susan Andrews, Moderator of the 215th General Assembly



Semper Reformanda conversation on the future of the church, with Ken Smith (left) moderating, and Jack Haberer and Barbara Wheeler speaking



Witherspoon Whole Gospel Congregation award goes to Brazil's United Presbyterian Church



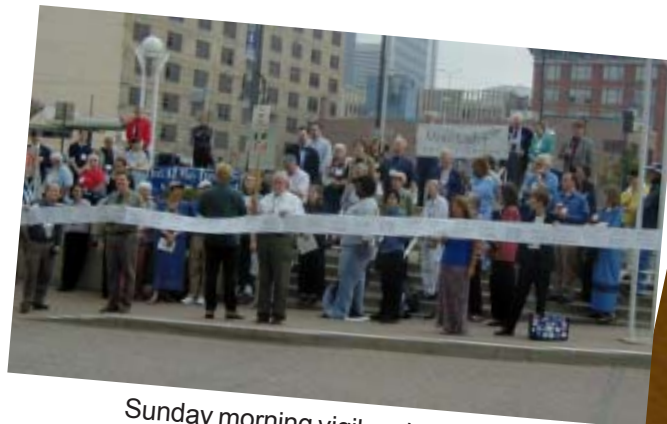
Trina Zelle describes work of commissioners at Witherspoon pre-Assembly orientation



Ray and Betty Kersting receive Witherspoon's Volunteer of the Year award from Jane Hanna



Rev. Jim Rigby, pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Austin, TX, speaks to Three Sisters' banquet



Sunday morning vigil and worship for an inclusive church



Rick Ufford-Chase addresses Peace Fellowship breakfast

The
Next
Network
News

Our next issue of *Network News* will offer a variety of news and comments on our church and our world.

We hope they will include more looks at our ongoing concerns with globalization and the new American Empire. We'll also take a look at emerging trends and issues in the Presbyterian Church, both locally and nationally.

You're invited (nay, urged, pleaded with!!) to send us whatever you would like to share with Witherspooners and friends around the country and in other parts of the world.

**Deadline for submissions
is
October 1, 2003**

**Please let us hear from you!
(And please note the new address and
phone numbers!!)**

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- _____ copies of the Winter 2003 issue, with reflections on the approaching invasion of Iraq, the need for commitment to “the common good”
- _____ copies of the Spring, 2002 issue, with Doug Ottati on C-67 and the Book of Confessions
- _____ 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.)

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