



That all may have life in fullness
John 10:10b

In a troubled world ... how shall we seek and share life in fullness?

Gathering in Richmond for the 216th General Assembly

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This special pre-Assembly issue of Network News is being sent to all General Assembly commissioners as a gift from the Witherspoon Society. We hope you'll find helpful reflections here, and that you'll stop by our booth and get acquainted with us in Richmond.

The President's Corner

Anticipating the General Assembly:

“On This Rock I Will Build My Church”

by Kent Winters-Hazelton, president

This past year, I have been living at the beach. One of my exercise routines is to take an early morning walk, heading north on the beach about a mile until I come to a cliff and have to turn around.

At the base of the cliff there is a rock sticking out of the sand, about 3 or 4 feet high, that I go around before heading toward home.

This past March, a series of heavy storms hit the San Francisco area, and the surf was too high to walk on the beach so I went up the hill instead. The next time I heading out for my rendezvous with nature at the beach, I got to the cliff and the rock was gone. I had a hard time believing that a storm could be so strong as to move a rock of that size off the beach. Over the next few days, every time I was on the beach, I would look for the rock. I just could not believe that the rock could simply be gone. I even went up on top of the cliff to look down to try to figure out the mystery.

After two weeks I had reached the point of giving up. Then one morning, when I got to the place where the rock had been, I took a few steps back and looked at the sand, the rocks and the cliff from a wider angle. Stepping back gave me a broader perspective to see that the landscape of the beach had changed. The storms that blew through had shifted the sand and dropped the level of the beach by five to six feet. Now that rock that was only three to four feet and could be easily passed when the tide was low had become a formidable rock formation of some six to eight feet with a base head-

ing out into the ocean.

Seeing things from a different perspective can often lead to a new understanding of our context. This is part of the experience that happens when we gather together for our General Assembly. When Presbyterians come together from all over the nation, you begin to see the church from a different perspective. At such a time, you encounter new views; you hear the scriptures read and proclaimed, and issues are discussed in a faithful, reasonable manner; your faith is shared and challenged; and as your perspective is widened, the church is strengthened.

This edition of the *Network News*, the quarterly journal of The Witherspoon Society, is being sent to all commissioners to this year's General Assembly. We offer this as a gift to introduce you to the work of our members as well as to share with you our concerns on issues of justice facing our denomination. In this edition you will find articles on a variety of topics that will be under discussion at this Assembly.



Kent Winters-Hazelton

While you are in Richmond, I hope you will have an opportunity to participate in some of Witherspoon's events, or at least stop by our booth in the Exhibition Hall to say hello. In return, we will offer you words of encouragement, a selection of quality buttons to help you express yourself, a handful of "W&W's" (or "M&M's" from a different perspective!), as well as the promise to pray for you as you engage in the work of the church.

One day, while walking on the beach (after my great rock epiphany) I found myself thinking about this year's General Assembly. I began to wonder, where's the faith? Often we find ourselves running around the Assembly Hall, hearing a cacophony of voices, bombarded by material reflecting views from all sides – even some you never knew existed in the church – finding it easy to be critical of the church and its

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process, and you can begin to wonder, where's the faith?

I have attended several assemblies and each one has a different flavor. But at each one, I hear about new initiatives and programs within our churches, I meet new friends and revisit old ones. I see the church in worship, in prayer, in confession, in action and in service. I always come away with a deeper appreciation and understanding of who and what we are as Presbyterians. Each year, I see a little bit more the rock than the year before.

May God's grace and peace be with you at the 216th General Assembly.

The Witherspoon Society Mission

We are a network of concerned Presbyterians responding to God's call to do justice, and to work with hope for healing and wholeness in a world increasingly broken.

Our mission is:

- to **listen** and **learn** from those who have been silenced;
- to **nurture** the prophetic voice of the church through reflection, discernment, and action;
- to **equip** Presbyterians for faithful participation in the church and the world;
- to **challenge** unjust relationships of power;
- to **advocate** for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and the full inclusion of all God's people in church and society.

Through our witness, we seek to revitalize the church's proclamation and action, informed by the full witness of the Bible and the confessions, animated by our hope for the reign of God.

You're invited!

Witherspoon events

at the 216th General Assembly,

June 26 - July 3, 2004

Richmond, Virginia

Friday afternoon, June 25, 1:00 to 3:30 pm

The Semper Reformanda Pre-Assembly Conversation will look at the document, "**Living Faithfully with Families in Transition.**" A panel discussion will include people who were involved in the drafting of the original document (Rev. Gloria Albrecht and Rev. Barbara Gaddis), its rewriting at the direction of the General Assembly (Rev. Eric Mount, commissioner to the 215th General Assembly, and Rev. Charles Wiley of the Office of Theology and Worship), and Witherspoon's Jennifer Stone.

Marriott Hotel, \$10.00

Friday evening, June 25, 7:30 to 9:30 pm

Commissioner briefing, following Covenant Network dinner. Get an overview of the assembly, learn about the issues and how to be an effective participant, and meet other commissioners who will be on your committee. The program reflects a progressive point of view.

Marriott Hotel, \$10.00

Sunday noon, June 27, 12:30 to 3:00 pm

Annual Witherspoon Awards Luncheon

Featured speaker: Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, Annie Scales Rogers Professor of Christian Ethics at Union/PSCE, on "Power in the Church." The annual Andrew Murray and Whole Gospel Congregation Awards will be presented. The annual Witherspoon business meeting will follow the lunch.

Marriott Hotel, \$26.00

Tuesday evening, June 29, 8:00 pm to Midnight

Witherspoon Party and Dance! Time for a break! A great chance to relax and enjoy great music, dancing, and conversation. A good time to meet others at the Assembly.

Marriott Hotel, \$20.00

To purchase tickets, use the GA Registration Booklet (*before June 4*) or call GA Meeting Service at 888-728-7228, ext. 2417. Unless an event is sold out, you can also buy tickets at the Assembly, at the registration counter in the convention center. **Questions?** Contact Gene TeSelle, phone 615-297-2629, or e-mail: teselle@bellsouth.net



The Editor's Spot

Abu Ghraib: a challenge to our faith

by Doug King

As I write this in the middle of May, the first shock of the revelations of American abuse of Iraqi detainees in Abu Ghraib prison is beginning to settle in. Or more likely, it's just beginning to unsettle us. Or at least it should, for it raises profound questions about our own nation, and about the religious beliefs and attitudes that seem to undergird our national culture today.

As people of faith, we recognize that there are theological issues here that cry out for attention.

The blame game is well under way. It's being said that the soldiers and Military Police were ill-prepared for the tasks assigned to them. Or they were afraid. Or they just didn't recognize "the enemy" as human beings. Or they were just acting under orders from the intelligence personnel. Or Secretary Rumsfeld should resign. Or it's the President who is ultimately responsible. Or it's the fault of the "terrorists" who started all this.

We may want to say Yes to all of the above, but I suspect there are deeper problems. In an excellent article that we posted in March, "Christians Must Challenge American Messianic Nationalism: A Call to the Churches," Rosemary Radford Ruether says that our current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been depicted by the Bush administration, and most clearly by the President himself, "as if they were episodes in an apocalyptic drama of good against evil, angels of light against the forces of darkness, God's chosen people against God's enemies." [You'll find her essay at http://witherspoonsociety.org/2004/ruether_call.htm]

Undergirding this holy war, she says, are four false theological assumptions: That "God chooses one nation above all other nations." That "the United States is God's uniquely chosen nation." That "evil is socially located in the enemies of the United States." And that "evil can be conquered by external coercion, ultimately by military force."

Based on these assumptions, the U.S. government has operated with blithe disregard for the delicate system of rules and agreements that have been developed over the past few decades as a way to keep the world from destroying itself. So the U.S. has viewed agreements to limit global warming and nuclear arms as applying to everyone else, but not to us. We have dismissed the UN as irrelevant – at least until things start falling apart and we need to cover our tails.

Further, by drawing a clear line between good and evil, we have made it easy, if not imperative, to treat the "bad guys" as indeed evil, and therefore not just less than human, but anti-human. Inhuman treatment is justified, it seems, for those whom we see as really not human.

Finally, the Administration seems to have seized upon the terrible acts of 9/11 as a grand political tool to inspire fear in the American people. The fear has justified many actions and policies that would probably have been rejected otherwise. So if the guards in Abu Ghraib have indeed been motivated by fear, they're just responding as we've all been taught over the past couple years.

In a culture of anxiety and a world divided into good and evil, the actions of the guards make perfect sense.

This does *not* mean the perpetrators of these crimes are really innocent. But it *does* mean that the question of guilt and responsibility is far more broad and far more complex.

If Christians are to offer any redemptive insights in this deeply troubled time, we must begin there: The real problems are deep. They are at base rooted in bad theology, as Dr. Ruether so clearly outlined it for us. We face a challenge today, to offer a prophetic witness to authentic faith and to point the way toward authentic living in the world.

As our church gathers in assembly toward the end of June, much more will have happened, but the challenge will still confront us: How are we to proclaim a faith the calls us – as individuals, as communities of faith, as a nation – to something higher than the narrow tribalism we have demonstrated? If we truly seek to follow a God who is the Creator of all people, and whose love is toward all, then how can we live out that faith in the face of such denials of humanity, such appeals to fearful hatred rather than to trustful love?

As we face issues that continue to divide us as Presbyterians, can we reach beyond our fears of those who are "other" than us, to proclaim and to live out the open, inclusive love that God shows to us and to all?

That may be our high calling for these very difficult days. May we help one another, in love, to obey that call.

A pastoral letter on Iraq

from the National Council of Churches

May 11, 2004

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ!

We, leaders of the thirty-six member communions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, write this joint pastoral letter at a time when the threat of violence hangs over the earth and warfare involving United States forces is increasing in Iraq. We write out of a deep love for this country, but also out of a profound concern at the direction this cycle of violence is taking us. This concern has been brought home to all Americans and indeed the world in the horrific pictures of prisoner abuse.

Two central claims of the Christian faith are crucial in our thinking: that every person, as a child of God, is of infinite worth; and that all persons, as participants in God's one creation, are related in their humanity and vulnerability. This is why the World Council of Churches has asserted that "war is contrary to the will of God" _ because it destroys that which God has made sacred.

In a sinful world, some of us may hold that there may be times when war is a necessary evil. But Christians should never identify violence against others with the will of God and should always work to prevent and end it.

We believe, with these things in mind, that the guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy must be to build up the whole, interdependent human family and to promote reconciliation whenever possible. Yes, this means standing firmly against all acts of

Continued on page 10

Coming this summer ...

Ghost Ranch Seminar—July 26-August 2

THE LIBERTY BELL HAS A CRACK IN IT



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

As we approach another presidential election, many people hope for important change across a spectrum of issues. Are we convinced that real change is possible? Is our democracy being eroded by political campaigns and decisions made in Washington, more often influenced by corporate power than by public opinion?

In the wake of 9/11 and anti-terrorist focus, there is concern that our democratic values are being compromised. The impact of free trade on the economies of poor nations, on labor and the environment are significant concerns. War as an instrument of foreign policy threatens civil liberties, the environment and economies.

Three eminently qualified people will lead us in exploring these issues from a faith perspective during our week together.

Andrew Kang Bartlett, National Associate for the Presbyterian Hunger Program of the PC(USA), has a graduate degree in international relations. He has worked in the US, Central America and Asia addressing community development, rural poverty, environmental health, and human rights. He represented the PC(USA) at the WTO Ministerials and ecumenical consultations on economic globalization in Cancun.

Elenora Giddings Ivory, currently serving her 13th year as Director of the Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (USA) the public policy information and advocacy office of the PCUSA. Reverend Ivory's responsibilities include, among others, civil rights and religious liberties issues. She has been particularly concerned about the possible denial of religious and civil liberties in the name of homeland security.

Peter Sawtell, Executive Director of Eco-Justice Ministries, an ecumenical environmental/economic justice organization. He works with church leaders around issues of social justice and environmental sustainability. He is known to many PRC/Witherspoon members as the author of "Eco-Justice Notes."

Coordinator: Jane Hanna

For more information, contact Jane at mjhfos@aol.com, or phone (505) 466-8755. Or visit the Ghost ranch website: <http://ghostranch.org/>

Some scholarship help is offered by Ghost Ranch.

Contact them at info@ghostranch.org, or phone 1-877-804-4678.

Looking toward the 216th General Assembly



What's Coming to this Assembly?

Witherspoon Issues Analyst Gene TeSelle surveys some of the major items that will likely be centers of attention at the General Assembly in Richmond, VA, June 26 - July 3.

Theological Task force presents interim report

The Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church was created by the 213th General Assembly (2001), to lead the church “in spiritual discernment of our Christian identity in and for the 21st century.” It was to deal with a broad range of issues, including but not limited to “Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and [get this] *power*.”

The Task Force was to make an interim report to each General Assembly – *and to presbyteries and sessions*, according to an amendment made on the floor – and make a final report to the 2005 General Assembly. Because the General Assembly has voted to meet in alternating years, the report will come to the 2006 Assembly.

A preliminary report was issued in February 2004, describing the work of the eighteen-member task force in eight extended meetings over almost three years.

This report makes “preliminary affirmations” emphasizing that Jesus Christ *is* the church’s peace, unity, and purity. Its language grows stronger as it moves through these themes. Christians are reminded that they cannot sever their ties with each other without the danger of separating themselves from Christ himself (cf. 1 Jn. 4:20). Purity is described in terms of “truth, goodness, and justice,” and twice in this section Presbyterians are urged to “*live into*” what Christ has already accomplished, to which we are joined by baptism.

Not much is said about the crucial issues the task force was directed to study. Two years ago we noticed that meetings were scheduled to deal with the first three – Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, and ordination standards – but none

with power. When we asked about this, they replied that they saw power as an aspect of all the other topics. But even less has been said about this. There is clearly much that remains unfinished in the Task Force’s work.

Some presbyteries have begun discussing what they might do to take their own part in the work of the Task Force. Answers seem to cluster into at least four groups. And each arouses its own set of comments.

1. Discussions might focus on the central issues of ordination, authority of Scripture, Christology, and power. The fear is that direct discussion of these issues would simply exacerbate tensions that are already present.
2. Presbyteries might start the way the Task Force did and discuss the ways Christ is the peace, unity, and purity of the church. Hopefully this would bring us together in what we share.
3. They might discuss the issue of how we can live together with our diversity and disagreement. (See my essay on “dealing with differences,” in which I try to learn from the way the Episcopal Church has been led to deal with its internal conflicts, on page 11 below.)
4. Finally, the suggestion keeps coming up that we remind ourselves of our unity in mission and service. In most presbyteries there is shared energy around the Hunger and Peacemaking Programs, and around the various activities of the presbyteries’ own Outreach committees. (Take a look at the principles on partnership adopted by last year’s General Assembly for the Worldwide Ministries Division, but applicable to everything that Presbyterians do. See page 10.)

Dealing with the ordination question

Again this year a number of overtures will offer a variety of ways to deal with “Amendment B,” now lodged in our Book of Order as G-6.0106b, banning the ordination of anyone who persists in

committing any of the multitudinous “sins” mentioned in our Book of Confessions. This provision has caused much conflict and confusion in the church. It has been administered unfairly, singling out sexuality and overlooking other sins. There has been uncertainty over how to administer it (e.g., whether prying questions can be asked during the ordination process). And key terms are less clear than they seem at first glance: “chastity” does not mean celibacy, since the confessions speak of chastity in characterizing marriage; there is certainly “fidelity” in committed same-sex relationships; and the meaning of “refusing to repent” can become hopelessly legalistic if it ignores other constitutional principles of conscience and interpretation.

1. Perhaps the most comprehensive of the overtures (04-49) comes from Twin Cities, with the concurrence of Hudson River. It would (a) delete G-6.0106b from the Book of Order, (b) add a sentence to G-6.0106a asserting that suitability for ordination should be determined “by the governing body where the examination for ordination or installation takes place,” and (c) remove the existing Authoritative Interpretations that have been used to ban ordination of LGBT people.

2. The Presbytery of Baltimore, with the concurrence of Southern New England, Genesee Valley, and Des Moines, is offering a simpler overture (04-4), proposing the deletion of 6.0106b without dealing with the Authoritative Interpretations.

3. Western Reserve is sending an overture (04-18) calling for elimination of the Authoritative Interpretations without dealing with G-6.0106b. This is an action that could be taken by the General Assembly, without needing to be ratified in the presbyteries. Detroit is offering a similar overture, with the affirmation that “within our denomination, people of good character and principle differ in their understanding of human sexuality, and in those differences we are called to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.”

4. A different approach is taken in an overture from Western New York (as the earliest to arrive in the office of the Stated Clerk, it is designated “04-1”). It takes a new approach, proposing to amend G-6.0106 by replacing “the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman” with “a covenanted relationship between two persons where a lifetime commitment is intended,” and replacing “which the confessions call sin” by “does not conform with this discipline.” The rationale is that “all persons should be guided by the same principles of sexual behavior regardless of sexual orientation.”

Reports (and in some cases the full texts) of these overtures can be found at http://witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/overtures_on_b.htm. All overtures submitted so far are listed on the PCUSA website, with links to the full text of each.

The Presbytery of Hudson River is sending an overture (04-52) “On Examining the Conscience of Candidates,” which would provide guidance to ordaining bodies on what are and are not appropriate matters on which candidates for ordination may be examined, and how the freedom of Christian conscience is to be

Perhaps we should pause to explain the controversy over Authoritative Interpretations (“AIs” for short). These AIs were enacted by the Assemblies of the UPCUSA (1978), the PCUS (1979), and the PC(USA) (1993). As the Western Reserve overture points out, these had the effect of amending the constitutional standards for ordination without ratification by the presbyteries. The constitution itself was later amended (1996-97) with the adoption of G-6.0601b. The Permanent Judicial Commission has already ruled in 2002 that, with this constitutional change, the AIs are no longer the prevailing standard by which judgments are to be made.

respected.

According to the Rev. Dr. Chris Iosso, former Witherspoon Issues Analyst and head of the Faith and Order Committee and the Third Way Project of the Presbytery, “the Presbytery considers itself a welcoming presbytery, with a diversity of theological stances and ministry styles.” It has proposed this overture out of an awareness of “controversies in other presbyteries that ‘narrow the gate’ for ministers, as well as a desire to affirm a diversity of perspectives on individual sessions and boards of deacons. It follows up the Presbytery’s concern for the use of the Confession of 1967 and the whole Book of Confessions.”

As the Assembly deals with difficult issues and serious differences, it may be helpful to recall what the Larger Catechism says about the duties required in the Ninth Commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” (See page 9)

Other issues coming before the General Assembly

Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick has listed the top ten issues coming before the 216th Assembly in Richmond. We update his list with the help of an article by Jerry Van Marter of the Presbyterian News Service (April 22).

1. General Assembly Council’s Mission Work Plan: The GAC will bring to the Assembly a major proposal to prioritize its mission programs in four areas -- evangelism and witness, justice and compassion, spirituality and discipleship, and leadership and vocation -- and offers 24 concrete objectives for putting them into effect.

2. Final Report on Middle Governing Body Relations: At the conclusion of 115 consultations over three years with synods and presbyteries, the GAC and the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly will be bringing a joint report on how to strengthen partnership between our governing bodies.

3. Reviews: Review committees have completed their studies of the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program and National Council of Churches and will bring to the Assembly positive reports on those two bodies.

4. *Transforming Families* paper: The 215th General Assembly (2003) referred the document back to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), expressing concern that there be more theological reflection and a stronger affirmation of traditional patterns of family life. The revised report will be a major item before the 216th General Assembly. (See p. 12 for a comment.)

5. Overtures on G-6.0106b: As in prior years, overtures to remove G-6.0106b from the Book of Order will be before the 216th General Assembly. This Assembly also will deal with additional overtures to remove all authoritative interpretations concerning homosexuality and ordination issued prior to the adoption of G-6.0106b in 1996.

6. Elections: As always, much attention will be given to the election of a moderator. (See pp. 20-23.) In addition, this is the year for the election of a Stated Clerk and for the confirmation of the presidents of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program.

7. Relations with Jews and Muslims: Because of controversy surrounding the new “messianic” congregation in Philadelphia Presbytery, Avodat Yisrael, and because of continuing unrest over the Occupied Territories, two presbyteries – Eastern Oklahoma and Hudson River – call for a study and reevaluation of PC(USA) policies on relations with Jews and Muslims.

8. Constitutional Amendments on Sexual Misconduct: Growing out of the work of the Independent Committee of Inquiry (into previous sexual abuse of missionary children in the Congo), the General Assembly Council will be bringing to the Assembly proposed constitutional amendments to prevent sexual misconduct by church workers and to protect children.

9. Overtures Relating to Abortion: Overtures are coming from three presbyteries – Upper Ohio Valley, Charlotte, and Beaver-Butler – to ban all so-called “late-term abortions.” The overture from Upper Ohio Valley seeks to add this prohibition to the Book of Order. Last year’s Assembly upheld the current policy, which has four conditions under which abortion of a viable fetus might be permissible: “when necessary to save the life of the woman, to preserve the woman’s health in circumstances of a serious risk, to avoid fetal suffering as a result of untreatable life-threatening medical anomalies, or in cases of incest or rape.”

10. Issues Related to a Post-9/11 World: Both ACSWP and the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations will be bringing proposals to the Assembly related to advocacy for justice in peacemaking, immigration, response to terrorism, and Iraq.

On the election of a Stated Clerk

The Stated Clerk is elected for a four-year term. Clifton Kirkpatrick was unanimously nominated by the review committee. But three conservative candidates have also come forward: Bob Davis, Rus Howard, and Alex Metherill, all of them highly critical of Kirkpatrick. As with the election of the Moderator, a majority (not a mere plurality) of votes is required.

With three opposing candidates answering questions on the platform, critics of Clifton Kirkpatrick will have plenty of air time. But this large slate of conservative candidates could divide the conservative vote, which has usually been no larger than 30 percent of the commissioners.

There is organized opposition to Clifton Kirkpatrick, claiming that he has not “enforced the constitution” in conformity with the demands of special interest groups.

The Assembly will hear lots of particulars from the three rival candidates for Stated Clerk, and Kirkpatrick will be quite capable of defending his record. But it might be helpful to take a longer-range perspective on this issue.

Those who want the Stated Clerk to take a more “activist” stance might be reminded of two major blunders by past Stated Clerks. Eugene Carson Blake, who was an assertive leader on many issues, orchestrated the prosecution of tax resister Maurice McCrackin in 1962. Ironically Blake himself was arrested a few years later for civil disobedience in desegregating a Baltimore amusement park. McCrackin had been a few years ahead of his time. The 1987 General Assembly expressed regret for this action and asked forgiveness. William P. Thompson ruled that the 1978 General Assembly, in adopting its “definitive guidance” concerning gay-lesbian ordination, had issued a “constitutional interpretation” despite its own stated intention. Thompson later reversed his position.

There are other important reports and overtures, too.

The vexed issues surrounding private property rights and the protection of limited water resources, including the question when environmental measures constitute “takings,” will be revisited in a paper that reaffirms and clarifies the policy adopted by the 1990 General Assembly (*Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice*). In response to an overture from Baltimore Presbytery in 2002, ACSWP (the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy) has studied the issues and recommends this updated statement. (See page 19 for more background.)

A study paper entitled *The Trinity: God’s Love Overflowing* has grown out of three years of deliberation by a Working Group

For background on social issues

If you want to get the full picture on the positions the PC(USA) has taken for several decades, you may want to consult the *Presbyterian Social Witness Policy Compilation* (PDS Order Number 68-600-000-001). The price is \$30 for a 512-page volume, well worth it for you or for your presbytery's resource center.

established by the General Assembly and facilitated by the Office of Theology and Worship. The General Assembly Council will recommend that this paper be the basis for a series of consultations on the Trinity throughout our church. A final report is to be made to the 2006 General Assembly. (See another comment on this report, on page 26.)

The Presbytery of Lackawanna has approved an overture (04-48) which would call on the church, the government, and individuals to work toward stabilizing and then reducing the global population, as a vital means of stewardship of God's creation. (See page 25.)

Washington Presbytery considered and then rejected (by 26 in favor to 76 opposed) an overture to implement "gracious separation" in the Presbyterian Church. The idea may still come to the Assembly from some other source. The proposal for "gracious separation" was largely authored by attorney Bob Howard, a former chair and still a member of the Board of the Presbyterian Lay Committee. His proposal essentially called on conservatives and evangelicals to split from the PC(USA) and form a separate church. The proposal was one of the major points of discussion - and disagreement - during the October 2003 national conference of the Presbyterian Coalition. (See my reflections on "Differences and Disputes," page 25.)

The Presbytery of John Calvin in Missouri is sending an overture to amend the Book of Order to specify the "essential tenets of the Reformed faith." (There's more on page 16.)

On avoiding "false witness"

During General Assembly discussions, it might be helpful to remember what the Larger Catechism says about the duties required in the Ninth Commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" (C-7.254):

. . . the preserving and promoting of truth between [person and person], and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth, and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors, loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocence; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

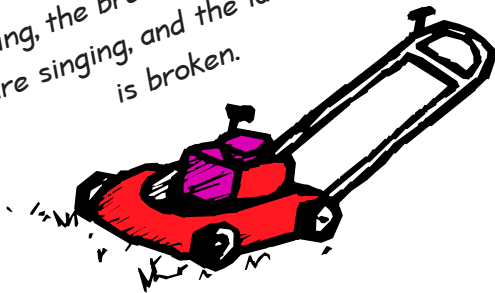


To receive regular e-mail notes of additions to the Witherspoon website, just send a note to

douging2@aol.com

Please put "web updates" in the subject line.

A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawn mower is broken.



Doing our work as partners

The 215th General Assembly approved a policy statement, "Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership," on the recommendation of the Worldwide Ministries Division. (It can be ordered as PDS #74 200 03 001.) It has broader relevance to everything we do in our congregations and our presbyteries. And the commitments listed below might provide a useful "examination of conscience" during the General Assembly.

Partnership Commitments

1. Shared Grace and Thanksgiving

- Is there courage to confess human sins and confront the forces that deny the abundant life God promises to all in Jesus Christ?
- Is God's forgiveness mutually shared in Jesus Christ?
- Does the community of partners join in thankful worship to celebrate God's gift of grace and renewal?

2. Mutuality and Interdependence

- Is each partner's self-reliance affirmed, with mutual giving and receiving?
- Is there space for all partners to be guided by self-determination?
- Beyond unhealthy dynamics of power and dependency, is there openness to new dynamics of mutual service and mutual renewal?

3. Recognition and Respect

- Is there recognition of the self-affirmed identities of each partner?
- Are the unique contexts of all partners recognized and respected?
- Are gifts and needs of all partners affirmed and respected?
- Are cultural differences being mediated with sincerity and in a Christ-like manner?

4. Open Dialogue and Transparency

- Is there local initiative in mission discernment and mission activity?
- Does God's Word shape us to lovingly confront one another's failings and prophetically challenge the world's systems of power and domination?
- Is there transparency with all partners about what is being done in mission, even if there is disagreement?

5. Sharing of Resources

- Do partners minister to and inspire one another, listen to and critique one another?
- Is there mutual accountability in the exchange of all resources, including human, cultural, financial, and spiritual?
- In trusting relationship, have partners moved beyond two-way relationships into open mission networks and ever-expanding webs of mission relationships?

Continued from "NCC," page 5

terror, but it also means envisioning a world in which war is truly a last resort.

Current U.S. foreign policy, however, is not aligned with this principle. Many people see our policy as one based on protection of our country's economic interests narrowly defined, rather than on principles of human rights and justice that would serve our nation's interests in deep and tangible ways. We are convinced that current policy is dangerous for America and the world and will only lead to further violence.

We, therefore, call for a change of course in Iraq, and we encourage you to do the same. Specifically, we are calling upon our country to turn over the transition of authority and post-war reconstruction to the United Nations – and to recognize U.S. responsibility to contribute to this effort generously through security, economic, and humanitarian support – not only to bring international legitimacy to the effort, but also to foster any chance for lasting peace. We would ask that members of our churches, as they feel appropriate, contact their respective congressional delegations to urge the U.S. to change course in Iraq.

We certainly recognize that faithful Christians of good will may disagree with one another when it comes to questions of national policy. We trust, however, that all Christians will pray and work for peace, remembering the words, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

We also urge all of our congregations and parishes to pray not only for the soldiers of this nation, as we surely do, but for all people, military and civilian, caught in this and other cycles of violence. When possible, join in prayer, discussion, and action with ecumenical and interfaith neighbors. Materials to assist in this are available from many of our churches and from the National Council of Churches.

As ecumenical partners, we know that it is a scandal that the body of Christ remains so visibly divided, often by those things that divide the world. Let us, however, be united as followers of Christ in our hope for that day when swords are beaten into plowshares and mourning and crying and pain will be no more!

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Supported by the thirty-six member communions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, including the Presbyterian Church, USA.

How can we deal with our differences and disputes?

Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Society Issues Analyst

In recent years conservatives have been talking about either leaving the church or finding some means of “gracious separation.” But this instantly produces anxieties, since congregations and individuals would be full of conflict when they tried to decide which way to go.

Perhaps we can learn something from the Episcopal Church, where a sizable majority of bishops voted in favor of recognizing Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. Conservatives in that church talked about setting up an alternative network within the worldwide Anglican communion. This would involve “non-geographical dioceses” uniting like-minded congregations and priests. In March 2004 the Episcopal bishops offered an alternative, a plan for “delegated oversight”: if a congregation could not accept leadership by the resident bishop, it might negotiate with this bishop for supervision by another bishop more to their liking.

In the PC(USA) we have seen similar proposals, and it might be helpful to consider all of them.

1. The *non-geographical presbytery* would make people more comfortable -- in fact, too comfortable. It is not likely to be good for the church’s mission to all sorts and conditions of people.
2. A more realistic approach would be to a kind of “*extra-territoriality*,” letting churches or ministers be linked with like-

minded presbyteries. This is the approach taken by the Episcopalians’ “delegated oversight.”

3. We could encourage “affinity groups,” with clear provisions for accountability and transparency like those of the old Chapter 9. We already have this in the “validated mission organizations” that work with Global Ministries.

4. The most controversial approach, which needs to be mentioned for the sake of thorough reflection, is to acknowledge the legitimacy of “*conscientious objection*” and “*conscientious abstention*” from the church’s policies. This would mean abandoning the Kenyon decision of 1975, which denied ordination to a man who said he could not participate in the ordination of a woman.

5. Most satisfactory is what I call the “*open-textured*” governing body, with mutual forbearance, understanding, and even affirmation. There are some presbyteries in which the various factions agree on procedural rules of encounter and perhaps even on their range of toleration on substantive issues.

When conflict rages and schism is threatened, we often say that “we are family.” This suggests basic unity and mutual loyalty, even when we do not like each other very much or tiptoe around each other at family gatherings, especially on issues of politics, sex, money, and religion.

Barbara Wheeler likes the alternative imagery of strangers and sojourners. William Sloane Coffin in his new book *Credo* says that “in joining a church you leave home and home town to join a larger world,” that “church is where all hearts are one so that nothing else has to be one.”

While you’re wandering around at GA ...

stop and see us at the Witherspoon Society booth - # 920 in the Exhibit Hall.

You’ll find friendly people, a place to sit and chat, to share concerns, to get information, copies of *Network News*, lots of fun buttons, and W & W’s, also know as M & M’s to the less creative.



The Transforming Families paper

A comment by the Rev. Dr. Barbara Gaddis

This study and policy document will be an important item of business for the 216th General Assembly. An earlier draft was substantially rewritten in response to criticisms at last year's General Assembly, orchestrated by the conservative Institute on Religion and Democracy.

The Rev. Dr. Barbara Gaddis, a family therapist, served on the Task Force that drafted the original document, and we have asked her to comment on this revised version.

What a daunting task, to examine the issues facing families and the church's response to family life in our current context. It has taken the ACSWP over 8 years, a Task Force, a Synod Consultation, a Panel, several editing teams, dozens of people, several editors and countless hours to produce the current document, and whether it was time well spent remains elusive.

The Transforming Families paper is a mixed bag.

The family paper like most papers from ACSWP consists of two basic parts: the recommendations to be adopted by the GA, and the rationale for those recommendations. In this case the recommendations comprise 17 pages, the rationale runs some 23 pages, with fully 9 pages of endnotes. A listing of resources for families and for ministry with families, along with a comprehensive bibliography, round out the 56 page document.

The Assembly is being asked to include the entire document – both recommendations and rationale – in its minutes, an unusual request, but in this case a good request. The rationale contains very well written and informative sociological and economic data, concisely presented to paint an accurate picture of the issues facing the modern family. The rationale will be an excellent study document for the entire church, worth the paper the GA will use to print it.

The recommendations section contains some intriguing ways to look at the family in the larger Christian context of baptism, weaving through the theological propositions references to the Confessions and Bible. It continues by making a case for such noble (if not novel) propositions as universal health insurance, flexible work hours, paid leave for care of dependent persons, abolishing “marriage penalties” in the tax code, safe, secure and affordable dependent care services to list but a few of its recommendations. The paper lays out a vision of family life that upholds values such as respect and honor for those married and those who are single, doing well by all children, providing more time for families to be together, and condemning the rampant “isms” of our day.

As I read these recommendations though, I cannot help wondering if it is already a dated document. I found myself agreeing with a colleague of mine who remarked, “I guess these things need to be stated somewhere, but there's a kind of ‘duh’ quality to them. It's not exactly a cutting-edge document.”

While I am generally supportive of the paper, I wish it had gone further. For instance, the paper offers no help in our current national discussion about same-sex marriage. The rationale lays out some information about same sex couples and their children, arguing that regardless of our beliefs, the children of such unions should not bear the brunt of our disagreements. The recommendations quote from the marriage ceremony in the Book of Worship regarding marriage being between a man and a woman. But these are minimal responses to what might be said in the face of what looks to be a train that has already left the station, with us on the platform wondering what just happened.

From the beginning this paper had the potential to be a lightning rod for the culture wars alive in our denomination. To be sure, the authors have carefully nuanced many an issue to prevent that from happening. In so doing, what they may have accomplished is not so much a forward thinking document, as a rationale for doing what we've always done.

[See page 15 for a light-hearted and slightly sceptical view of the problem of defining marriage. Ed.]

We invite you to visit the Witherspoon website during the General Assembly for news and commentary during the week - from a progressive point of view.

And we hope you'll come back again (often!) after the Assembly is over, to keep in touch with developments in our church and in the world.

It's at
www.witherspoonsociety.org

From one's who's sat in the Commissioners' seats:

What I've learned about being a commissioner

by the Rev. Trina Zelle

The author is currently serving on staff at Church of the Beatitudes, UCC, in Phoenix, Arizona. She lives in Tempe, and is involved in the "No More Deaths" campaign on Arizona/Mexico border. She is also Secretary of the Witherspoon Society. She offered a little "advice to commissioners" at the Witherspoon commissioners' briefing before the 2003 General Assembly. (See page 3 above for information on this year's event.) She had so much wise advice that we asked her for a copy of her comments, and she has updated them to be presented here. She presents this as if to the commissioners on Friday evening before the Saturday convening of the Assembly.

I want to begin by expressing my hope that all of you respect or, even better, like the political process. I say that because all too often, I've read reports about the goings-on at GA that disparage its political nature. Personally, I think politics provides us human beings with a perfect venue for getting things done – not because of how good we are but because of how flawed we are. Anyone who accepts the doctrine of utter depravity can appreciate the balancing and remedial effect that political activity has.

If you still have doubts, I would urge you to refer back to Jesus' parable of the tricky (and politically astute) manager who, upon learning that he's about to be canned, cut deep discounts for everyone who owes his employer money. This maneuver guarantees that he'll have at least a few friends once he's unemployed. Pretty good thinking. Or, if the lobbying of special interest groups offends you, I suggest you reread the book of Ruth, who, at the urging of her mother-in-law Naomi, got the attention of her benefactor and future husband by sleeping at his "feet." Lobbying and family values.

Having said that, I'm here to fill you in on what it's like to be a commissioner to GA. Although last year was my first experience as a commissioner, this is actually my sixth General Assembly in as many years. Political junkie that I am, I've sat in on a fair number of committee

meetings and almost every plenary session. And so what the last few years has taught me, I want to pass on to you.

Now, I'm assuming you've all gone to your presbytery's commissioner training and there will be even more of that tomorrow, so I'm going to avoid the technical stuff that you've already gotten or will shortly. This is what they *don't* tell you.

As GA begins, some of you might feel like you've bounced right back into the Boys' or Girls' State of your high school years, only most of the people here have gray hair and not many of us have water balloon fights in the hotel hallways at three in the morning.

Tomorrow is when the real deal begins. Tomorrow night we will be electing our moderator to preside over this General Assembly. The moderator is important for several reasons. They preside over the plenary sessions of this assembly and if you don't know it yet, you should: whoever holds the moderator's gavel holds a lot of power. Not infinite, but a lot. A commissioner may not speak without being recognized by the moderator. The strategic importance of this should not be underestimated. Through their rulings, a moderator can short-circuit or allow floor activity. And this year's moderator will be instrumental in selecting the chairs or moderators of the 2006 assembly committees. As you are about to learn, committee moder-



ators set the tone for the work of the committee. So as you vote tomorrow, remember that your vote will affect both this year's and the 2006 assembly.

Starting Sunday evening, you will spend the first part of the week with your assigned committee, dealing with overtures and resolutions. The second half of the week is comprised of legislative – or plenary – sessions, usually three a day. This is the time that the entire body deals with what has been in committee during the first half of the week.

After our closed, get acquainted committee meetings Sunday night, your work begins in earnest on Monday morning. You'll find you're doing at least two things at the same time: dealing with the legislation before you and getting a sense of what's going to happen during the upcoming plenary sessions, including who your likely allies are, both now and later.

More importantly perhaps, you'll soon learn who your worthy opponents are as well as their larger strategy. Listen for catch phrases – often sounding quite progressive – that are repeated by a number of people that might indicate the over-arching strategies of commissioners who will oppose progressive actions. One year the phrase was "grass-roots."



The reality couldn't have been further from the truth.

As I just mentioned, Sunday evening is devoted to team building. Even though I've just warned you about catch phrases and strategy, try to begin your time together with an open mind. Just because you and your seat mate are on opposite sides of one issue, doesn't mean there aren't other issues where you are in agreement. And sometimes it's good to vote yes on an issue that you might not really agree with, in order to get support on an issue that's important to you. None of this is ever said out loud. It's just a matter of being sensitive to the people around you.

With some issues though, it's generally easier to vote "no" right away to something you're uncertain about. You can always change to "yes" later. Don't, in the interest of being seen as a team player, go along with what might seem at the outset like innocuous requests from the committee moderator or vice-moderator, but later on could limit your decision making authority. For example, two years ago, the moderator of Bills and Overtures, who had close ties to the Presbyterian Coalition, made what sounded like a reasonable request. He asked that, in the interest of time and convenience, the larger committee would allow the moderator and vice moderator to make decisions about last minute legislation and materials for distribution without reconvening the whole committee. This was presented as a convenient and common sense way to operate, which is why the commissioners came back to plenary after dinner one night and found an unanswered document on their desks that basically advocated a controversial overture to insert the General Assembly into a Northern New England judicial case.

Very few of the observers in your committee room will be disinterested observers. They represent all sides to an issue. All of them will be happy to discuss the issues with you from their particular perspective, which is fine. Just remember, they are representing a certain position which you may or may not agree with. We will have liaisons in each committee

room as well, whom you should feel free to approach. They might even be able to help you develop strategy or figure out who else on your committee is probably like-minded.

You'll possibly be hearing emotionally charged testimony on all sides of an issue. Take notes you can refer to later, when you're alone and can think more clearly. Figure out the essentials of any piece of legislation that comes before you so you'll know if amendments that might be offered would fundamentally change it or not. I know of more than one instance where the amendments were so confusing that people ended up voting for the opposite of the motion's original intent.

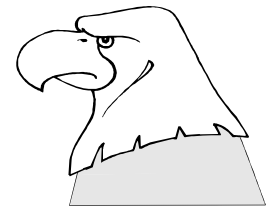
And just because something is passed in committee doesn't mean it will be by the full assembly – or vice versa. You might vote with the committee majority with a great deal of satisfaction only to have the assembly accept the minority report that the dissenters write. Or you might find yourself in the position of writing a minority report. If you do, you'll probably be wanting the assistance of someone who's been there, done that, so that it has a better chance of passing.

During plenary sessions: Try to make sure you're not off the floor when a vote comes up, but take regular breaks. A couple of years ago there was abuse of the "move the previous question" motion which short-circuited debate as well as confusing people as to what they were actually voting on. That hasn't happened during recent assemblies but corporate amnesia being what it is, it might cycle through, so be alert.

Beware of that cranky mood that groups of Presbyterians are prone to. I call it the Emily Letilla syndrome: "What's all this about..." We trivialize what's obviously important to a lot of people and it's disrespectful to the gathered body. I've seen horrible legislation passed because it was late or time for lunch or the issue was complicated. People got irritable and impatient and the legislation that was passed showed it.

And – two last things. Come to our dance/party Tuesday night. It's a good time to cut loose a little before three and half mind- and posterior-numbing days. And stop by our booth for fellowship and W & W's – some people call them M & M's. The folks there will commiserate with you, answer questions, or, depending who's on duty, give you a mini-back rub.

And no matter what your opinions or political perspective, we're glad you chose to be with us here tonight. Our opinions might divide us, but our mutual commitment to Jesus Christ brings us together in the only true unity there is: "Oh how good and pleasant it is, when sisters and brothers live in unity."



A nature lesson

How do you identify a bald eagle?

All of his feathers are combed to one side.

So what's in a family?

As the debate heated up over a constitutional amendment to define marriage, someone offered these Biblical definitions of marriage, in the form of a "Draft of a Constitutional Amendment to Defend Biblical Marriage":



- Marriage in the United States of America shall consist of a union between one man and one or more women. (Gen 29:17-28; II Sam 3:2-5.)
- Marriage shall not impede a man's right to take concubines in addition to his wife or wives. (II Sam 5:13; I Kings 11:3; II Chron 11:21)
- A marriage shall be considered valid only if the wife is a virgin. If the wife is not a virgin, she shall be executed. (Deut 22:13-21)
- Marriage of a believer and a non-believer shall be forbidden. (Gen 24:3; Num 25:1-9; Ezra 9:12; Neh 10:30, 2Cor 6:14)
- Since marriage is for life, neither the US Constitution nor any state law shall permit divorce. (Deut 22:19; Mark 10:9-12)
- If a married man dies without children, his brother must marry the widow. If the brother refuses to marry the widow, or deliberately does not give her children, he shall pay a fine of one shoe and be otherwise punished in a manner to be determined by law. (Gen. 38:6-10; Deut 25:5-10)

You're invited to join in on ...

CONVERSATIONS AT THE PEACE FELLOWSHIP BOOTH

RICHMOND GA, JUNE 2004 – BOOTH NO. 722

SATURDAY, JUNE 26 – 2:00 TO 3:00 PM
"Richmond Peace Education Center"

- Ken Willis, Director

SUNDAY, JUNE 27 – 3:00 TO 4:00 PM
"Presbyterians Concerned about Colombia"

- Bill Galvin, Anne Barstow, and Members of Presbyterian Delegation to Colombia, May 2004

MONDAY, JUNE 28 – 3:00 TO 4:00 PM
"No More Deaths" - Volunteering in the Arizona desert to save lives of Mexican migrants who have lost their way.

- National Young Adult Volunteers in migrant ministries on the border.

TUESDAY, JUNE 29 – 10:00 to 11:00 AM
"Israel/Palestine: Is Peace Possible?"

- Christine Caton, Christian Peacemaker Teams

TUESDAY, JUNE 29 – 3:00 TO 4:00 PM
"Prisoners of Conscience-2004 Peaceseeker Award Honorees"

- Presbyterians Who Have Gone to Prison as a Witness to Close the School of the Americas (WHISC)

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 30 – 10:00 TO 11:00 AM
"The Christian Leadership Challenge: Peace Is More Patriotic Than War"

- Dr. Bob Edgar, Peace Breakfast Speaker in Dialogue

Also Al Winn will be signing copies of his book, *Ain't Gonna Study War No More*, which will be available at the booth. Check the booth for dates and times.

How shall we think about the

“Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith”?

Eugene TeSelle

Every candidate for ordination in our church is asked, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith . . . ? While the constitution speaks of “essential tenets,” it does not spell them out anywhere; instead it gives us the Book of Confessions and asks us to consider it in the light of Scripture. That leads to the rhetorical question, “Doesn’t this church know what it believes?” At least one overture will be coming to the 2004 General Assembly asking for a specific determination of the essential tenets. On reflection, the issue is not as simple as it may first appear.

I. What is the meaning of “essential tenets” in American Presbyterianism?

The term was coined in answer to demands in England and especially Scotland for “*strict subscription*” to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Presbyterians in America, with the Adopting Act of 1729, took a different approach. They required 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.

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., from 1788 until 1967, asked ordinands whether they affirmed the Westminster Standards as “containing the *system of doctrine* taught in the Holy Scriptures.” This was interpreted, of course, in the spirit of the Adopting Act of 1729 and the agreements of reunion between Old Side and New Side (1758), Old School and New

School (1869-70), the PCUSA with the Cumberland Presbyterians (1903), and the PCUSA with the United Presbyterians (1958).

These reunions would not have happened *without* the spirit of the Adopting Act. The PC(USA) as we have it today is the product of that spirit. The flexibility of language must be interpreted, not as a fall from some imagined clarity and rigor in the past, but as the founding spirit of our church from its very beginnings.

With the adoption of the Book of Confessions (1967) the UPCUSA rephrased the ordination questions as well. Today all persons being ordained must state that they will be “instructed,” “led,” and “guided” by the confessions of the church, but it is understood that these are “in obedience to Jesus Christ” and “under the authority of Scripture.

In 1982 the UPCUSA adopted a statement entitled *Biblical Authority and Interpretation*; in 1983 the PCUS adopted a more comprehensive statement entitled *Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture* (they have been printed together in a booklet, DMS # OGA -92-003). These clearly state that a variety of methods of interpreting Scripture are used, quite legitimately, in our church. And in 1986 the General Assembly of the reunited PC(USA) adopted an informative document entitled *The Confessional Nature of the Church* (this has been printed, along with two later documents approved by the General Assembly, in a booklet entitled *Confessions, Principles, and Diversity* (PDS #70-420-99-007, \$3).

II. How has the reformed faith been stated?

When we look at our confessions, we discover that they differ not only in *content* (I’ll come to that later) but even in the *manner* in which doctrinal affirmations are made.

For starters, our confessions differ in the *order* in which topics are discussed. The Second Helvetic and the Westminster begin with *Scripture*. The classic creeds follow the order of the *baptismal formula*: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. C-67 and the Brief Statement follow the order of the “*apostolic benediction*” (2 Cor 13:14): the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The Westminster Confession does not speak of the “system of doctrine contained in the Scriptures”; it uses the quite different language of “*the whole counsel of God*” (C-6.006) as communicated through Scripture. This re-focuses doctrinal issues in a fruitful way. While “the whole counsel of God” involves theoretical assertions about God and Christ, what is emphasized is the good news of salvation and renewal; to put it another way, its primary concern is with God not *before* but *in and through* the work of salvation. Similarly the Second Helvetic is interested in “what pertains to a saving faith and the framing of a life acceptable to God” (C-5.002). This is also the tone of the Confession of 1967 and the Brief Statement adopted in 1991, both of which contain helpful summaries of the good news of grace.

One overlooked 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). It tells about God’s activity toward the human race, God’s reconciling action in Jesus Christ, and the mission of the church as “the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all of humanity”; then it spells out the life of the church in proclamation and action, calling for an

attitude of “openness” to God’s contemporary action, the diversity of its own membership, and a “continuing reformation of the church ecumenical.”

The Confession of 1967 makes four strong assertions along this line in the section on “Reconciliation in Society.” Even as they state the need to *express* Christian faith in the world, they also caution against actions in society that *distort* the faith. Those who want to draw boundary-line issues in the church’s witness:

- “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).

Thus there are diverse modes of approaching the question of “essential tenets,” but it is important to proclaim “the whole counsel of God” in a way that remains gospel and does not become primarily law.

III. How have the “essential tenets” been listed?

When we set about specifying the “essential tenets,” we find that the *content* differs as much as the *modes*.

Some lists try to be comprehensive, while others concentrate on what is central. Some emphasize what is distinctive to the Reformed tradition, others what is shared with other traditions.

It is interesting that Presbyterians today seem to avoid *predestination* as an essential tenet of the Reformed faith, even though that was the trademark of the Reformed tradition for several centuries. The 1986 document on *The Confessional Nature of the Church* starts a longer list of points concerning which the Reformed tradition has changed: the exact nature of predestination, the role of women in the church, the legitimacy of artistic representations of Christ, the relation of the church to the “civil magistrate,” the importance of missions, and so on.

When people try to list the *chief emphases* of Reformed theology, they usually mention

- God alone,
- Scripture alone,
- Christ alone,
- grace alone, and
- faith alone.

During the impassioned debates of recent years, many in the PC(USA) have pointed to the “*Great Ends of the Church*” (G-1.0200):

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Adopted by the United Presbyterian Church in 1916 as a supplement to the Westminster Confession, they were carried over in the union that constituted the UPCUSA in 1958. They have been seen as a consensus statement that can be agreed to across the theological spectrum.

In a very different vein, a set of five Presbyterian “*fundamentals*” was adopted by the General Assemblies of

the PCUSA in 1910, 1916, and 1923 as “essential and necessary articles of faith.” They included

- biblical inerrancy,
- virgin birth,
- substitutionary atonement,
- Christ’s bodily resurrection, and
- his miracles.

Then they threw their point away by adding that “others are equally so.”

Subsequent General Assemblies reversed course, on the grounds that the General Assembly has no power to add ordination requirements beyond those spelled out in the Book of Order, that it is inappropriate to insist on exact formulations that have only human authority, and that diversity must be respected in a spirit of tolerance.

In 1965 the Presbyterian Lay Committee was organized and funded by J. Howard Pew with the stated purpose of opposing the Confession of 1967 and the entire concept of the Book of Confessions. The Lay Committee recognized that the inclusion of other confessions would compromise the exclusive authority of the Westminster standards. The Lay Committee was thus setting itself in the tradition of “strict subscription” and resisting the historic Reformed position that doctrinal statements are confessional in character, not claiming an authority of their own.

Recently we have seen the enunciation of a new “*three fundamentals*” by the self-proclaimed “*confessing church movement*” — infallibility of Scripture, no ordination of homosexuals, and salvation through Christ alone.



For further reading

Several books deal with the controversy during the Twenties: Loetscher’s *The Broadening Church* (Pennsylvania, 1954), Longfield’s *The Presbyterian Controversy* (Oxford, 1991), and Weston’s *Presbyterian Pluralism* (Tennessee, 1997).

The *Presbytery of San Diego* in June of 2003 adopted a list of “*guidelines*,” including six “*essential tenets*,” seven “*Reformed distinctives*,” and a long list of “*questions for examinations*” that reinforce many of the same points. While the presbytery claims that it is not demanding “strict subscription,” there are justifiable fears that these “guidelines” will be used in exactly that way, as a litmus test by which to admit or exclude candidates for ordination.

Indeed, attempts are currently being made to get the General Assembly to draw up a list of “essential tenets” that would be binding upon all governing bodies. The *Presbytery of John Calvin* in Missouri has adopted an overture (04-03) calling on the 216th General Assembly to “reorganize and improve” three sections in chapter 2 of the Form of Government (G-2.0200-0500) and make them “essential tenets” to which all ordained persons must subscribe. If adopted, an amendment to the Book of Order would be sent to the presbyteries, with slight rearrangements of these three sections — but also with the official declaration that these are “among the tenets deemed essential to an understanding of the Reformed faith, as expressed in the confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”

When we read chapter 2 of the Book of Order, it becomes clear that it is a prelude to chapter 3, cited above, which emphasizes *the mission of the church as an expression of God’s gracious purposes for humanity*. There are many topics, furthermore, that are not mentioned at all in these paragraphs, or are dealt with more helpfully in other places.

In actual experience as they teach and preach, many Presbyterians discover widely admired statements that have never been adopted officially. That happened with *A Declaration of Faith*, adopted by the PCUS General Assembly in 1976, rejected by the presbyteries, and then approved by the 1977 Assembly for study purposes. Although proposals have been made several times that the reunited PC(USA) include the *Declaration* in the Book of Confessions, no General Assembly has seen fit to send it

to the presbyteries. And yet the *Declaration* is widely used for teaching and worship, since it is a confession that speaks the language of modern times and deals with contemporary issues while presenting a comprehensive summary of the faith.

IV. Who should make the judgment?

The Presbytery of San Diego, in justifying its adoption of “guidelines” for persons seeking ordination, cites one of the principles of church order (G-1.0302): that every church, union, or association “is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members . . .” This raises a major issue of procedure.

It is one thing for a governing body to *interpret* the Book of Confessions and make a judgment whether a person seeking ordination is within legitimate bounds. That is the tradition of American Presbyterianism, which has left this to the governing bodies and has refused to draw up a specific list of essentials. It is another thing for the governing body to *add requirements* to the Constitution; and it would certainly be doing this if it insisted on use of the exact language of its own statements. This would be a refusal to acknowledge that alternative language might be entirely legitimate, and it would violate the old tradition that a candidate might have permissible “scruples” about some features of the Book of Confessions.

Presbyteries often draw up a list of “suggested questions” for persons wanting to become members of those presbyteries. These are not slanted in one direction or another; neither are they made hard-and-fast requirements. They are intended to ensure that every potential member is treated the same way and that the presbytery gets a reliable understanding of the person’s theological perspective. At the same time these presbyteries are careful not to impose their own statements as a binding test.

The responsibility of the ordaining body (the session or the presbytery), and of

the person being ordained, cannot be avoided (see G-0108b). Ordination inevitably depends upon a discernment process, and this must be based upon inquiry and dialogue about many aspects of Christian faith and life, not upon set formulas. Not only individuals but presbyteries need to be engaged in continual inquiry.

Clearly there are widely differing styles of stating the “essential tenets” of the Reformed faith. Furthermore, the richness of the faith cannot be reduced to a few sentences. If it were to be tried, these affirmations could themselves be interpreted in different ways.

We like to affirm the mystery of God and God’s ways. To say that they are mysterious is not, of course, to say that they are unknown; rather it is to say that, even when they are revealed to us and are understood in part, we cannot presume that we have achieved a final and completely adequate formulation. That is why our church says that its doctrinal statements are “confessional,” not dogmatic. That is why we acknowledge the legitimacy of different kinds of language and different ways of speaking. And that is why we continue to acknowledge the need for conversation and mutual discernment, without the idolatry of making specific formulations into a shibboleth by which to make quick and easy judgments.

Background on a resolution to the 216th General Assembly:

On Limited Water Resources and Takings

Robert L. Stivers

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) has sent a resolution on limited water resources and “takings” to the 216th General Assembly (2004) in June. This resolution clarifies existing policy found in *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice*, the environmental policy statement adopted by the 202nd General Assembly (1990) and responds to an overture from the Presbytery of Baltimore to the 214th General Assembly (2002).

The resolution states that in general where water resources are limited, the basic needs of declining species should take priority over out-of-stream and other instream users. Likewise the resolution gives priority to the reserved rights of Native Americans.

In addition the resolution states that it is not appropriate at this time for the Presbyterian Church to take a position on the complex and undeveloped questions regarding compensation by the government where application of these priorities results in restriction in the use of water by holders of water rights. This is the so-called “takings” issue. ACSWP determined that the legal questions were just too complex and needed to be resolved further by the courts.

Following from this decision not to take a stand, ACSWP further asks the General Assembly to rescind a Commissioner’s Resolution to the 213th General Assembly (2001) on the Klamath River Basin drought that said “the takings of water rights is the taking of private property.”

PARO (Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options) in Richmond

PARO Dinner

This year, for the first time, PARO is sponsoring a dinner: Sunday, June 27th, at 7:15pm at Second Presbyterian Church. The event highlights and celebrates our denomination’s pro-Choice position and will feature conversation with Dr. Lee Carhart and members of the PARO Leadership Team. The cost is \$12. Tickets can be purchased in advance using the GA registration packet, at the Assembly Ticket Booth, or at the PARO booth in the Exhibit Hall.

Dr. Carhart, an Air Force physician for 21 years, began performing abortions in 1988 after he retired, when a friend who is a nurse asked if he would perform abortions at a local clinic. He is one of three abortion providers in Nebraska and the only one who performs late abortions. Dr. Carhart was the physician in *Stenberg v. Carhart*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2000 that, by a 5-4 vote, struck down a Nebraska abortion ban. The Court found the ban unconstitutional on two independent grounds: (1) it lacked a health exception and (2) its broad language imposed an “undue burden” on a woman’s right to choose abortion.

Women’s Advocacy Luncheon

PARO presents Dr. Lee Carhart at the ACWC (Office of Women’s Advocacy) luncheon on Tuesday, June 29th. The Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory, director of the PCUSA Washington Office and Chair of the Board of Governors of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, will also be featured at the luncheon (\$20).

PARO Presents Dr. Lee Carhart

PARO invites all to a dessert/reception for Dr. Lee Carhart on Tuesday, June 29th, at 7:30 pm at the Convention Center, following the PHEWA Awards Event there. Dr. Carhart will be speaking on “Choice: What is at Stake? What Can We Lose?”

A man came to the hospital to visit a friend. He had not been in a hospital for several years and felt very ignorant about all the new technology. A technician followed him onto the elevator, wheeling a large, intimidating looking machine with tubes and wires and dials. “Boy, would I hate to be hooked up to that thing,” he said.

“So would I,” replied the technician. “It’s a floor-cleaning machine.”

Candidates for Moderator respond to Witherspoon questions

One of the first acts of the 216th General Assembly will be the election of a new Moderator. To help our readers weigh this important choice, the Witherspoon Society has asked each of the three candidates to respond briefly to five questions that reflect Witherspoon concerns — and, we believe, concerns of the wider church.

With thanks to the candidates for their cooperation in responding, we are happy to share their comments here, presented in alphabetical order. If you want more information about any of the candidates, you might use their web sites, listed at the end of their responses.

The Rev. Dr. David McKechnie

A member of New Covenant Presbytery, Dr. McKechnie is pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston, TX.

Website: <http://davemckechnie.org/>

The *Christian Century* has published many articles on the theme “How My Mind Has Changed.” What would you say are the most significant changes in your mind – and heart – in recent years?

I believe good leaders are perpetual learners. I have learned that embracing new concepts is a must for my personal growth. Globalization demands that Christians broaden their perspective on political, social, economic and spiritual issues. AIDS is not somebody else’s problem, it is our problem. The power of the screen has significantly changed our methods of communication. With few exceptions, the Church has missed this opportunity to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ via technology. Daily I am reminded that we are all made in the image of God. As a result, my own conscience has been pricked and I have become more sensitive to people’s pain.

What have you learned from the Theological Task Force? How would you as Moderator help to build peace, unity, and purity in our church? Would greater specificity about the “essentials of the Reformed faith,” as sought by several overtures this year, help in this process?

I deliberately attended the most recent meeting of the Theological Task Force in Dallas. I wanted to see for myself the process and its content. I was profoundly impressed by their compassion for each other. Community is happening. They are doing serious theology. They are not avoiding the tough issues but indeed wrestling with them. In spite of disagreements, I sense that these folks are cognizant of being participants in the Body of Christ. I left that meeting with a desire to trust them in the process and pray for their discernment.

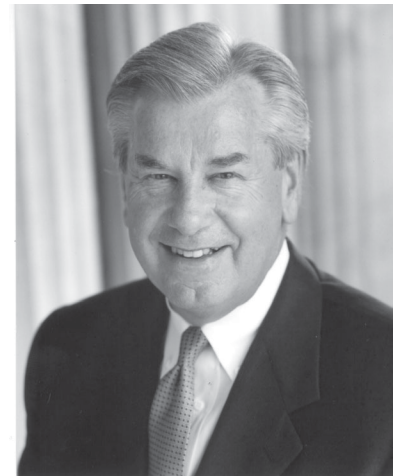
There are many who feel that adding G-6.0106b to the Book of Order was a mistake, and most Presbyterians expect it to be removed within a matter of years. When it is removed, how can we avoid the tensions that we have recently seen in the Episcopal Church?

I dare not predict the future. I know that G-6.0106b will be discussed at this General Assembly. I would prefer to let the Theological Task Force do its work before any action is taken on this issue. Their report will be published in the summer of 2005. Action will then be taken at the 2006 General Assembly.

The weakness in the Episcopal system is their hierarchal clergy. The strength of the Presbyterian system is the importance of each person’s opinion and the checks and balances. Pastors in our denomination work hard at building community not just followers.

The nature and definition of marriage and the family is a matter of considerable debate both in our national life and in our church. How would you like to see our church deal with marriage and family, both in pastoral care to individuals and families, and in the national debate?

Nothing is of greater influence on our lives than the family experience. Family matters! Some of the Biblical models of family are positive. Some of the Biblical models are not. They are a lot like us. I do know that Jesus had an overriding concern with relationships. As a pastor, I can affirm that people living in close proximity do not necessarily make a family. There are deliberate decisions that must be made. A close emotional bond between parents and children is the most important factor in



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The Rev. Dr. K. C. Ptomey, Jr.

A minister member of Middle Tennessee Presbytery, Dr. Ptomey is pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville, TN.

Website: www.kcptomey.com

The *Christian Century* has published many articles on the theme “How My Mind Has Changed.” What would you say are the most significant changes in your mind – and heart – in recent years?

There was a time when I thought that the way to get things done in the denomination at every level was to amass as much power as one could in order to win. I now realize that our polity is designed to enable us to engage in a process of discernment. We are commissioned to participate in the governing bodies as ones who are seeking God’s will for the church and world. This implies listening to one another as well as articulating our own points of view. It means not making up our mind before we have a chance to engage in dialog. It means being open to the Spirit to lead us to new truth.

What have you learned from the Theological Task Force? How would you as Moderator help to build peace, unity, and purity in our church? Would greater specificity about the “essentials of the Reformed faith,” as sought by several overtures this year, help in this process?

The Task Force has made every effort to put Jesus Christ at the center of its work and to ponder the meaning of being his living body. This is the only way for the denomination to find a way through the issues that threaten to divide us. As the Task Force has said, Jesus Christ *is* our peace, our unity and our purity.

As Moderator I would encourage the church to follow the example of the Task Force in putting Jesus Christ at the center of our denominational life. I will be an advocate for presbyteries, Sessions, and congregations forming groups to study the preliminary report of the Task Force and to read scripture and pray together for the Spirit’s guidance as we seek Christ’ will for the PC(USA).

Presbyterians throughout our history have found it helpful, indeed necessary, to be engaged in an ongoing dialog regarding the “essentials of Reformed faith.” This exercise keeps us close to the Scripture and in conversation with our creedal heritage. Because we “see through a glass darkly” every human attempt

to capture the mystery of God’s truth in creeds and doctrines is inadequate. Thus, historically, we have resisted naming the “essentials” of Reformed faith, but have sustained a passion for dialog regarding what we believe and why. Reformed Christians have consistently agreed that living in the tension between God’s truth and our limited understanding is preferable to absolutizing any human dogma or “essentials.”

There are many who feel that adding G-6.0106b to the Book of Order was a mistake, and most Presbyterians expect it to be removed within a matter of years. When it is removed, how can we avoid the tensions that we have recently seen in the Episcopal Church?

Again, the Task Force is modeling an excellent approach. In asking the church to study this matter, pray together, and engage in open and honest dialog, it encourages us to open ourselves to each other in the conviction that in the process of prayer and Bible study and dialog we will be led by the Spirit. If we take this process seriously, the potential will be great for developing understanding and trust.



The nature and definition of marriage and the family is a matter of considerable debate both in our national life and in our church. How would you like to see our church deal with marriage and family, both in pastoral care to individuals and families, and in the national debate?

The work that has been done on the paper *Families In Transition* along with the work we will do on it at the General Assembly, in my opinion, will become an important and positive contribution to the national debate on this subject. The paper strongly affirms marriage as the ideal foundation for the Christian family. It also asserts that God works through all kinds of families. Thus, it recognizes and offers support and encouragement for families of various configurations. What a good thing for the PC(USA) to support, encourage, and offer guidance to all of those who seek to create loving, safe, nurturing, caring, homes in which children may develop and grow to maturity. We serve a God who in Jesus Christ is revealed as one who loves all children. The church can do no less than to love all God’s children and find practical and concrete ways to stand with and support their parents.

As we move into an era of economic globalization and of U.S. dominance in military and diplomatic affairs, what responsibilities do we have as the PC(USA) in the life of our nation?

The Great Ends of the Church puts it so well: we are called to be

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Rick Ufford-Chase

An elder member of DeCristo Presbytery, Rick Ufford-Chase is co-founder and co-director of BorderLinks in Tucson, AZ

Website: www.rickuffordchase.com

His address to the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at the 215th GA is posted on the Witherspoon website, at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/empire_and_church.htm. It was entitled "Empire and Church: Pitfalls and Priorities for the Presbyterian Church in a time of Globalization."

The *Christian Century* has published many articles on the theme "How My Mind Has Changed." What would you say are the most significant changes in your mind – and heart – in recent years?

Last year when the United States went to war against Iraq, I was absolutely opposed to that decision. As a Christian pacifist, that wasn't difficult at all. What was hard was the commitment my wife and I made to become reservists with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). Responding to a strong sense of call to do nonviolent, direct-intervention in situations of extreme conflict like Colombia or Iraq was very difficult for us as parents of an eight year-old.

Yet our CPT training was one of the most important experiences of our twelve-year marriage. We spent a month with fourteen other Christians, who ranged in age from twenty-two to seventy-seven years old. Together we explored the roots of non-violence in scripture, trained in techniques of conflict transformation, and role-played how to respond effectively when confronted with soldiers or extremists who are addicted to violence.

Violence and terror will continue to reign unless and until we who profess Christ follow his nonviolent example. This must become matter-of-fact, much as few of us blink when we send Christian soldiers off to war. As challenging as this decision has been, I know that our nonviolent witness in those situations of conflict is the greatest gift I can offer my son.

What have you learned from the Theological Task Force? How would you as Moderator help to build peace, unity, and purity in our church? Would greater specificity about the "essentials of the Reformed faith," as sought by several overtures this year, help in this process?

Most of us in the church don't know very much about the work of the Task Force.

Still, the Task Force is important! As a church in the reformed tradition, we must constantly rethink the way we express our faith in light of God's continual revelation to us. Just as

important, the Task Force is modeling how to work respectfully with one another to find common ground.

However, in spite of the best efforts of the Task Force we are likely to remain a church deeply divided over important theological matters. Affirming the core convictions that unite us as the people of God is the best way to deal with that reality. We must celebrate our common faith in Jesus Christ, one Lord and Savior of us all, and follow that Christ into a suffering world.



There are many who feel that adding G-6.0106b to the Book of Order was a mistake, and most Presbyterians expect it to be removed within a matter of years. When it is removed, how can we avoid the tensions that we have recently seen in the Episcopal Church?

No one I know is qualified for ordination in Christ's church. All of us fall short of what God desires for us. For instance, few Presbyterians have sold everything they own to give the proceeds to the poor and follow Christ. Not many of us, in a time of terrorism, are genuinely prepared to respond to Christ's radical call to turn the other cheek and love our enemies. Most of us can point to broken relationships in our lives and we must confess that we often don't have the strength to make things right.

Ordaining our leaders is a humbling task in a church where no one is qualified. Each of us would do well to remember our own brokenness as we accept that challenge. With God's grace and some humility from us, we can nurture good leaders. We can be a community of believers who support one another as we each discern our sense of call and what God has in mind for us.

There is no way to avoid tension and disagreement over this important issue. I pray that we will remain mindful that we are one body - the body of Christ crucified and suffering but also resurrected in the world.

The nature and definition of marriage and the family is a matter of considerable debate both in our national life and in our church. How would you like to see our church deal with marriage and family, both in pastoral care to individuals and families, and in the national debate?

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I try to remember three things:

- Jesus constantly challenged his community's definition of who was in and who was out. We should do no less.
- My heterosexual marriage is in no way threatened by someone else's nontraditional, loving marriage and family.
- The goal for the church is to nurture and care for all families, and to support them as they are called into the world to do God's work.

As we move into an era of economic globalization and of U.S. dominance in military and diplomatic affairs, what responsibilities do we have as the PC(USA) in the life of our nation?

Eighty percent of the world's citizens live on the underside of the global economy. For the few of us who are the winners in the global economy, it's hard to imagine what it is like to work hard every day without any chance of securing our families' futures.

In Matthew 25, Jesus is clear about how we will be judged, not just as individuals, but as nations. "I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, sick and without clothing and a stranger and you cared for me."

As Presbyterians of great wealth, we face hard choices. Will we choose to take Jesus at his word? Or will we refuse to see Jesus in the face of the homeless person in our neighborhood, the undocumented migrant crossing our border, the Palestinian living under occupation, the fifty-hour per week factory worker in Mexico who still can't feed her kids.

It is daunting to take up the challenge to be Christ's church in the world. Still, I think Jesus meant it.

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an "exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world." As an embodiment of the Kingdom, Jesus stood with the poorest of the poor and embraced the weak and powerless. In his life, death and resurrection he demonstrated that love is stronger than hate and non-violence is the only appropriate and effective response to violence. He showed us that true greatness, true strength, is to serve rather than to be served. As individuals and as a church we are called to follow Jesus as we seek to embody as he did, the values of the Kingdom.

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reducing teen smoking, drinking, drug abuse, violence, sexual immorality and suicide. The church has an obligation to promote those close emotional bonds.

The Statement on Marriage endorsed by the Roman Catholics and the Southern Baptists is worthy of our perusal.

I look forward to the report on Transforming Families that will come to the 216th General Assembly.

In my present pastorate, families who had children with special needs were not part of our children's ministries. For that reason, we created Grace Place; Sunday School classes, Vacation Bible School and camp programs for children with special needs. Its effectiveness is real. To date, thirteen churches in the Houston area have emulated our model.

As Moderator, I will not expect people to agree with me on every issue, but I will do my best to represent other people's point of view fairly.

As we move into an era of economic globalization and of U.S. dominance in military and diplomatic affairs, what responsibilities do we have as the PC(USA) in the life of our nation?

As Presbyterians, it is our responsibility to speak truth to power. We can choose to be prophetic or pathetic! I take Acts 5:29 seriously, "We must obey God rather than human authority." Our denomination has a strong heritage of providing leadership in public life. We need to be encouragers of political involvement. The plight of the marginalized must be on our agenda. The beginning of healing is an accurate diagnosis. Presbyterians have the ability to do that.

Justice issues demand that we speak to them and act with integrity. However, prior to speaking or acting, is the issue of prayer. I deeply believe that the awakening of the social conscience begins with prayer. Our prayers never end with Amen. They continue as we open our eyes, unfold our hands and get up off our knees. The beginning of healing is always an accurate diagnosis.

Covenant Network events at General Assembly

The 216th Meeting of PC(USA) General Assembly will convene on Saturday, June 26th, in Richmond, Virginia, and the Covenant Network will be there with educational events and advocacy leadership from gavel to gavel. We especially encourage all commissioners and advocates to begin by joining us for the **Covenant Network Convocation Dinner** on Friday, June 25th, at 5:30 p.m. and then attending the **Witherspoon Society Commissioner Orientation** immediately following at 7:30 p.m.

Friends are welcomed at our **Covenant Network Open House** in our hospitality suite at the Crowne Plaza on Sunday, June 27th, from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. Brian Blount will be our Speaker at one of the most popular General Assembly events, the **Covenant Network Luncheon** on Monday, June 28th, at 12:30 p.m. We extend a special invitation to seminarians, younger pastors, TSADs and YADs to attend a **Reception for Young Adults** on Monday, June 28th, from 8:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. in our Crowne Plaza Hospitality Suite.

While the tickets for the lunch and dinner can be purchased in Richmond, we recommend buying them early, as these events often sell out. Register online at www.pcusa.org/ga216/registration or call the GA meeting service at 888-728-7228 x2417.

Commissioners, Advisory Delegates, and others who want to learn more about the Covenant Network at G.A. are invited to contact National Organizer Tricia Dykers Koenig by phone at (216) 658-1770 or by email, triciadk@covenantnetwork.org.

Far From Home introduces people we've lost

Arriving shortly in church offices and presbytery resource centers is a new booklet that brings forward the names and faces of those who have been pushed out of the Presbyterian Church (USA) by our current ordination standards. The Covenant Network is pleased to make *Far from Home: Tales of Presbyterian Exiles* available to Presbyterian congregations, groups and leaders as an aid to discussion of ordination standards and our common life. Please look for your copy to arrive at your church and plan how to use it with others in your deliberations. Additional copies can be ordered for \$1/copy from the Covenant Network office.

THE PEACE BREAKFAST

Sponsored by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Wednesday, June 30 – 6:45 am

*“The Christian Leadership Challenge:
PEACE IS MORE PATRIOTIC THAN WAR !”*

SPEAKER: DR. BOB EDGAR

General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, former Member of Congress, with a passionate & lucid commitment to social justice and human rights, outspoken against the Iraq War

2004 PEACESEEKER AWARD:

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Presbyterians who have gone to Prison as a Witness
to Close the School of the Americas (WHISC)

BREAKFAST TICKETS \$18.00 (full breakfast)
Order your ticket NOW, with your registration for G.A.

\$5.00 REBATE for Commissioners & Advisory Delegates
Wear your Commissioner or Advisory Delegate Name Tag to the Breakfast to receive your \$5.00 rebate at the door.

PLACE: Marriott Richmond Hotel, Salons F,G,H,I,J
500 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia

Visit the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Exhibit in the Exhibit Area.

To order tickets directly, send \$18.00 check to
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship:
c/o Peggy Howland, 245 Rumsey Road, Apt. 3J,
Yonkers, NY 10701-4526 (by June 10)
or e-mail PegHowland@aol.com

Advance tickets purchased by mail may be picked up at the PPF Exhibit by Tuesday afternoon, or at the door Wednesday morning.

Background on Overture 04-48 —

On Global Population Stabilization and Reduction, from the Presbytery of Lackawanna.

by the Rev. Dr. William Gibson and the Rev. Willem Bodisco Massink

In this new century commentators, political candidates, business people, and job-seekers all keep worrying about getting back to the “good times” of the last decade of the 20th century. People in the Western hemisphere assume that commerce and consumption can and must expand, as they did in the last century, for individuals to continue to live the “good life.” They fail to connect this assumption with the fact that the global population more than tripled in that century and demographers expect that at least two billion more people will live on this planet by 2050. By that time the total world population will have risen above the 8,000,000,000 (8 billion) mark.

The 21st century will not, indeed cannot, replicate the population and economic expansion of the past. Nature will not permit it. The intricate systems and laws of nature by which the Creator makes life possible and good on our planet will not allow it. The deepest crisis of our time is the crisis of the survival of life; and God, the Lord of life and of history, is in the crisis declaring new things. God’s people respond both by listening to the Word and by looking at the world around them.

The Word we need to hear goes all the way back to Genesis 2:15. The Creator placed the human creature in the garden “to till it and keep it.” To till means to draw from the earth the sustenance of life, but also to keep it, meaning to preserve the earth in order that the earth might continue to sustain life for generations to come. If now we look at the world, we see that our western civilization has failed to keep, serve, and cherish the earth – to till with great care and to share equitably the fruits of tilling, the good things with which God wants God’s creatures to be filled.

This realization provides the theological and social context of this Overture on “Global Population Stabilization and Reduction” to the 2004 General Assembly, meeting in Richmond, VA. The Overture draws upon existing G.A. policies and extends them more fully into the 21st century. It recognizes that the human impact is slowly but inexorably undermining and destroying the earth’s capacity to sustain life. Too many people are demanding too much of the earth and its natural resources and this will continue for many years to come, further reducing the earth’s capacity to meet them.

This Overture does not focus on population growth in a narrow way. It recognizes that the human impact on the capacity of the earth to sustain life depends not only upon the number of individuals inhabiting the earth, but also upon the amount of production, consumption and the technologies being used today

and in the future. Furthermore, the stabilization and reduction of the global population depend also upon the reduction of the shameful inequalities existing between 1st and 3rd world countries that now prevail.

This Overture extends the policy base of the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s public witness by calling for U.S. leadership in a concerted effort to bring births into balance with deaths within the next quarter of the century.

It specifies public policies and changes in personal attitudes necessary to make this happen. It asks people to make their decisions about having children prayerfully and conscientiously in the light of the human impact on nature in its totality. And it seeks to transcend the present abortion debate by calling for united efforts to keep unintended pregnancies from occurring.

This Overture assumes that the Creator-Redeemer wants human and other life to flourish together indefinitely. It presupposes that stewardship in our time, God’s time, means restraint in both procreation and consumption, while we work at fashioning systems and technologies that foster a livelihood for all people that is sufficient, sustainable and satisfying. This is the stewardship that follows from listening to the Word and looking at the world, God’s world, at this critical turning point in history.



2004 Presbyterian Peace and Justice Conference

August 3-7, on the
campus of Pacific
Lutheran University in
Tacoma, WA.

This year’s conference will deal with issues of hunger, environmental concerns and economic justice.

The intergenerational event will be sponsored by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, the Environmental Justice Program and the Self-Development of People Program.

For more information and registration materials, call 888-728-7228, ext. 5785, or visit the Web site www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/conferences/2004.htm.

A comment on the GA study paper on the Trinity:

Trinity in Name Alone: Divine Love without Agency

by the Rev. Larry Golemon, PhD, minister member of San Francisco Presbytery, and Lecturer at Dominican University and San Francisco Theological Seminary

A study paper entitled "The Trinity: God's Love Overflowing" has grown out of three years of work by a Trinity Working Group established by the General Assembly, and working under the Office of Theology and Worship. At this summer's General Assembly, the General Assembly Council will recommend that this paper serve as the basis for a series of consultations on the Trinity throughout the church. A final report will be made at the General Assembly in 2006.

Responding to the paper, theologian Larry Golemon argues that while it is helpful, it could be much more helpful by taking current thinking more seriously, by emphasizing God's nature as social/relational, and as dynamic – God as becoming rather than static being.

The new paper by the G.A.'s Trinity Working Group is commendable on many levels: it emphasizes the social nature of Trinitarian theology; it links Trinitarian discourse to Christian practice; it explores Trinitarian aspects of the liturgy; and it suggests a Trinitarian shape to Christian mission. All of this helps return Trinitarian discourse to the heart of Reformed theology, worship, and mission in a vital and timely way. However, I wonder if the Working Group took the G.A.'s charge too literally: by focusing on the Trinity and language for God, they may have skewed the entire discussion toward the internecine politics of gender and God-language in the denomination. If so, the document was predestined to fail by preferring a proliferation of God images without direction or agency, at the expense of the deeper forms of Trinitarian

thinking, especially from the last 100 years.

There have been two significant developments in modern Trinitarian theology. The first is to clarify the social nature of God's being as a relation between "others." Through the revitalized Trinitarian frameworks of Barth and Rahner and their followers, the recovery of 4th century Cappadocian thought by scholars like Lacugna, the rediscovery of the Trinitarian shape of eucharistic prayer, and the exploration of social and political implications of the Trinity by liberationists, this doctrine has become the touchstone of God's self-giving as a process of self-othering. Instead of God replicating God's-self in a pattern of identity in the three persons, God "proceeds" in a process of differentiation, whereby each "person" is different from the others, while fully participating in their shared life and "essence." In short, God's own being is one of becoming (Jungel), in and through the relation of each divine person to the others.

While the Working Group emphasizes the social nature of the doctrine, it does so without any sense of God's own processional "time" or becoming. Consequently, it shows a bias toward the classic language of stasis—that of "being" or "communion"—instead of the more contemporary language of movement—that of "agency" and "sociality." For example, the paper entirely overlooks the Cappadocian's favorite translation of "perichoresis" as a "divine dance." The net result is to soft-pedal the divine ethics of God's becoming through a process of self-differentiation, whereby "difference" is valued as much or more than "sameness" and "identity." The truly social understanding of the Trinity

affirms that God is not a safe and harmonious relation of enmeshed, look-alike personalities, but a risk-taking God, whose self-giving is toward the "other" that responds in freedom, especially in the incarnation of Christ.

The second major development in 20th century Trinitarian thought has to do with the historicity of God's social nature and becoming. Since Rahner's careful coordination of the immanent ("inside") and economic ("outside") Trinity, and Barth's re-insertion of Jesus' story into the very heart of God, many theologians now see the Trinity as God's own becoming in and through history itself. Whether one stresses this becoming in human history as "the Humanity of God" (Barth) or as the "Crucified God" (Moltmann), the very shape and intentionality of Triune relations must be reconceived in an incarnational direction. No longer does the mutually indwelling Godhead sit at the edge of history, overflowing its love into all creation and life (Edwards); instead, this self-same God enters the fray of history's powers and sins, and takes them up into God's own being for their redemption. As the crucifixion enters the very heart of God, the door is open for human life to participate fully in that divine struggle to vanquish the powers of history, as the resurrection promises. Our participation is not a matter of extending God's intent to our own missional activity, as the paper suggests, but rather, it is a matter of "joining" and "following" in God's movement in the cross, so that we are taken up into the very activity of God's Triune struggle for redemption.

What kind of document on the Trinity does the Church need at this time? One that teaches the Trinity as a "summary" of the gospel in this sense: in the Trinity we catch the basic movements, direction and agency of God, as reflected in Scripture. The direction of Scriptural salvation cannot be read in a Christian fashion without Trinitarian patterns of sociality, otherness and cruciform agency becoming deeply formed in our members. That the power of Trinitarian doctrine lies more in its "grammars" or patterns and forms, than in its actual use of "images" is surely right (Lindbeck). It is by

recognizing Trinitarian grammars and employing them in liturgy, personal devotion, and mission that we learn to read what God is doing afresh, in and through the Biblical narrative and our world. Then, and only then, can we recognize the gender issues for what they actually help us do in theology: explore different models of the “person” – including subjectivity and agency – by which we recognize God’s own being and work.

The point of all these images is not to enhance our own ability to identify with the Godhead, but rather to recognize the strange and miraculous ways that God has chosen to identify with and claim us. What we need is a paper that lays out viable Trinitarian grammars and their practices for today – in liturgy, discipleship, and mission – so that we can truly recognize and participate in what God is doing anew. Until then, this paper asks us to use the traditional Trinitarian formula as an “anchor” for all other God-talk, which unfortunately keeps the Presbyterians tied down in the backwaters, untouched by the traffic and flow of contemporary Trinitarian developments.

Theologians referenced:

Barth: Karl Barth, Swiss Reformed theologian who shaped mid-20th century “neo-orthodoxy” in the U.S.

Cappadocians: An early church school of theologians (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus) from the 4th century, who stressed the three distinct persons of the Trinity and their dynamic relations.

Edwards: Jonathan Edwards, 18th century American Reformed theologian who “modernized” Puritan thought in terms of the Enlightenment.

Jungel: Eberhard Jungel, 20th century Protestant theologian of Europe, and major interpreter of Karl Barth.

Lacugna: Catherine Lacugna, 20th century Catholic theologian who recovers the social nature of God’s revelation “for us” in the Trinitarian relations.

FROM THE SHOWER OF STOLES PROJECT

Martha G. Juillerat,
National Program
Director



The Shower of Stoles is a collection of nearly a thousand liturgical stoles from lesbian, gay, bisexual and

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

Include the Shower of Stoles in your congregation’s fall programming! We encourage you to consider having a small display of stoles at your church this fall to recognize Coming Out Day in October, World AIDS Day in December, your congregation’s More Light anniversary celebration or other educational opportunity. For more information please visit our website at www.showerofstoles.org.

STOP BY AND SEE US at the General Assembly in Richmond, VA. We can help you put together a story for your stole, or discuss ideas for a display of stoles. We look forward to seeing you there!

Lindbeck: George Lindbeck, living “post-liberal” Protestant theologian of the Yale school, who argues for doctrine as “grammars” or rules by which we appropriate Scripture and creeds.

Moltmann: Jurgen Moltmann, living Reformed theologian of Europe, who affirmed a social doctrine of the trinity that embraces the full implications of the crucifixion.

Rahner: Karl Rahner, Roman Catholic theologian of the 20th century, who refashioned traditional Catholic thought in modern terms, and had a strong influence on Vatican II.

Theological musings

A regular column by Dr. Douglas F. Ottati, Professor of Theology, Union Seminary/PSCE (and Witherspoon's first correspondent in space)

Theology Matters

The English Puritan, Richard Baxter, wrote the balance of his *Christian Directory: or, a Sum of Practical Theology* – a city phonebook-sized compendium of Christian training – in 1664 and 1665. In it, he offered interpretations of everything from family life, and the responsibilities of church members and ministers, to the callings of soldiers, lawyers, and physicians. Baxter lived during tumultuous times in both church and society. (He survived civil war and was a force for moderation on a committee set up under Oliver Cromwell to devise a list of Christian essentials. He was prohibited from preaching in 1662 by the Act of Uniformity, and he was imprisoned for a time in 1665.) So, we are not entirely surprised to find him answering critics in the “Advertisement” to his *Directory*.

Objection II. Your writings differing from the common judgment, have already caused offence to the godly.

Answer. To the godly that were of contrary opinion only.

Objection IV. Your Ecclesiastical Cases are dangerously reconciling, tending to abate men's zeal against error.

Answer. The world hath long enough escaped the danger of peace and reconciliation. It had been well enough if they had as long escaped the danger of your conceited, orthodox strife, which hath brought in confusion and all evil deeds.¹

Our own circumstance is not as turbulent as Baxter's, and our writing is rarely as lively. Nevertheless, our church is beset by controversies, and the contentious ecclesiastical climate reflects a changing, often divided society. Americans today confront ecological threats, terrorist attacks, questions about unbalanced American international power, and the rise of Islamist radicalism, as well as both promising and troubling scientific advances. They find themselves in the midst of changing patterns of global economy and immigration, increased educational and employment opportunities for many women, new communication and information technologies, prominent (mostly urban) professional and secular enclaves, contested gay marriages, traditionalist reactions, and a plurality of social-moral authorities. Culturally speaking, the center seems to be fragmenting rather than holding. Accordingly, “established” denominations such as our own, which once had their niche in an earlier cultural synthesis, are rendered insecure. They are no longer certain just what to legitimate and what to de-legitimate. Denominational politics are passionate and sharp, and passionate and sharp politics

almost inevitably develop some unattractive sides, e.g., self-righteous posturing, vicious caricatures, spurious charges, and occasionally irresponsible journalism.

Under these circumstances, and taking a page out of Baxter's book, many Presbyterians sense that theology matters. For one thing, comments on the challenges, issues, and changes

confronting our society are offered by very many institutions and communities – from the political parties, the newspapers, and the networks, to the AARP, NOW, NAACP, the Sierra Club, business and professional associations. The distinctive thing that churches have to offer is *an explicitly theological* consideration of current practices, issues, and events. Even more fundamentally, perhaps, it is only by fostering genuine theological inquiry and discussion that the church is able to relate its deepest convictions and beliefs to contemporary life.

Today, however, one also sometimes detects an additional, more wishful motive among Presbyterians for supporting theological discussions, namely, the hope that they will foster greater unity and agreement. The idea is not without merit, and it is easy to see why it should surface in a denomination divided by controversies. But, especially in contentious times, it seems important to cut our confidence down to size. Despite all the committees and commissions, despite all the attempts to foster sustained conversation among “pastor-theologians,” we should not assume that paying more attention to theology necessarily will promote unity and peace.

Part of the reason has to do with the persistent connection between Christian theology and church teaching. Broadly speaking, Christian teaching is instruction in a Christian way of living. It is training intended to help people interact with other persons, objects, situations, and realities in a manner that is faithfully responsive to the God disclosed in Jesus Christ. That is, the church has an interest in helping people interact with their families, their possessions, governments, forests, fishes, and more in a manner that is also faithfully responsive to God. The church tries to help people live faithfully.

For our purposes, here, the critical point is that the enterprise of building up people in a faithful way of life itself requires some reflective activity. It requires that we articulate a vision or a picture. This is so because we need a vision or a picture of objects and others in relation to God if we are to know how to interact with them in a manner that is faithfully responsive to God. If we are to interact with families, possessions,



governments, forests, and fishes in a manner that is faithfully responsive to God, then we need to have some picture of how these things are related to God. This is where Christian theology comes in. Christian theology is the reflective attempt to picture or envision ourselves, as well as the many objects and others with which we interact in relation to the God disclosed in Jesus Christ. And, this is not an optional ecclesiastical “head-trip,” but an intellectual activity that remains indispensable for those who wish to make a faithful witness.

Consider any number of contemporary challenges and issues. The church has a stake in encouraging us to ask how we might respond to economic interests as well as to delicate natural ecologies in a manner that is faithfully responsive to God. It has an interest in asking how we shall engage international politics in a manner that is faithful. Questions such as these require that we interpret environments, persons, institutions, and practices in relation to God. They require that we engage in theological reflection. And, our theologizing often is improved by conversations and debates. Still, in the course of theological conversations and debates, very many different things can happen.

Take, for example, our current differences over gay ordination, same sex unions, and gay marriages. Many people point out that there are important exegetical questions involved, as well as more general understandings of scripture and its authority. But, in fact, there is a host of additional questions lurking just below the surface. Some have to do with creation, christology, and theological anthropology. Others concern how to make use of the Bible in moral and theological arguments, as well as whether and how we shall make appeals to personal accounts, biology, psychology, and cultural studies. Not to mention questions about sin, grace, law, justice, and the doctrine of the church.

The church is and ought to be a community of theological discourse, and it makes sense for Presbyterians to discuss all of these things and more. Occasionally, we may find that some people agree about sin and grace even though they differ on gay ordination and / or interpretative questions surrounding Romans 1:26-27. We may also find that some people entertain deep exegetical differences but nevertheless agree that scripture is authoritative. Others, although they agree in supporting gay ordination and same-sex marriages, may have sharp disagreements when it comes to christology as well as the significance of empirical studies for Christian theology and ethics. Still others may be led to the realization that they differ, not only on the quite significant practical issues of gay ordination and gay relationships, but also on how to understand the Bible, God, creation, Jesus Christ, the Gospel, grace, sin, and the church.

Obviously, some of these discoveries may help some people to identify shared ideas and convictions, as well as to articulate why they elect to stay together in the same church despite

significant differences. It therefore makes sense to have a measured confidence in the ability of theological study and conversations to strengthen church unity. But it should come as no surprise to Protestants that, sometimes, theological study, conversation, and debate serve only to sharpen our awareness of extraordinarily deep differences and disagreements. Theology matters, but it does not always foster ecclesiastical unity and peace and, indeed, it cannot be reduced to a means to these ends. As Baxter well knew, theology matters when it fosters peace and unity in the church and also when it doesn't. It matters because it is integral to the church's attempt to foster and to make a faithful witness to the only God. So, let a thousand theological conversations bloom, but don't be surprised if, at the end of the day, there are still debates to join and critics to answer.

¹ *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter in Four Volumes* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), vol. 1, p. 5.

~~Wrong~~ Great expectations

It was a stifling hot day and a man fainted in the middle of a busy intersection. Traffic quickly piled up in all directions, and a woman rushed to help him. When she knelt down to loosen his collar, a man emerged from the crowd, pushed her aside and said, “It’s all right honey, I’ve had a course in first aid.”

The woman stood up and watched as he took the ill man’s pulse and prepared to administer artificial respiration. At this point she tapped him on the shoulder and said, “When you get to the part about calling a doctor, I’m already here.”

REVIEW

Eco-Justice – The Unfinished Journey

Edited by William E. Gibson, 2004. Published by State University of New York Press, 90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, NY 12207

Review by John (Jack) C. Twombly, Professor of Electrical Engineering Emeritus, University of Colorado, and Restoring Creation Enabler, Presbytery of Plains & Peaks

“Involvement in eco-justice for me has meant good work, more rewarding personally and more important, I think, to others than anything else I have done. I have a community of colleagues and the support of fantastic folks in the Eco-Justice Network . . . On the journey, communicating the message, straining to do that better and to move on faster, my life is very full.”

— William E. Gibson

The above reflection in this remarkable book best introduces William Gibson, its editor. It portrays his joy and the importance he attaches to laboring in a community of gifted, dedicated folk patiently pursuing the common goal of eco-justice. He calls upon their unique talents and perspectives to craft this book. It is a compilation of essays and speeches by 23 individuals, Gibson among them. These contributions are meaningfully grouped into three parts entitled:

- (I) The Eco-Justice Perspective: Crisis, Meaning, and Motivation
- (II) Eco-Justice Issues
- (III) The Journey Continues.

Eco-Justice Issues is the largest, composed of 16 of the 25 chapters (individual presentations) in the book.

Integration is achieved through frequent editor’s notes by Gibson, most notably a defining introduction and a final chapter whose unspectacular title *Concluding Considerations, Continuing Journey* belies the eloquent and memorable text of these concluding 26 pages. They would be praiseworthy alone; however, without the rich background of the pre-

ceding 24 chapters their riches would be diminished.

Gibson does us a considerable favor by providing an early chapter entitled *Eco-Justice: What is it?* Unfortunately the expression “Eco-Justice,” now at least a third of a century old, is still widely misunderstood among Christians. Gibson was involved in the early activity that defined it. I will whet your appetite with his brief explanation regarding the core concept, upon which he subsequently expands.

Eco-Justice does not mean merely another aspect of justice, so that now we have to speak of social justice AND eco-justice. The term eco-justice retains the ancient claim upon human moral agents to build and nurture responsible, equitable, compassionate relationships among humans in the social order. And it incorporates the realization that has come like a revelation to our own time, that human societies cannot flourish unless natural systems flourish too. It affirms, moreover, that the non-human realm is not merely instrumental to human well-being but intrinsically value-laden in its own right.

In 1972, having completed his doctoral studies at Union Theological Seminary, Gibson undertook a campus ministry at Cornell University. Through a life-altering confluence of events that increasingly focused his concern on the carelessness with which humans were abusing this planet and “doing so in ways that would rebound harshly and perhaps fatally upon themselves,” he began lead-

ership of what became the *Eco-Justice Project and Network* (EJPN). From 1974 to 1992, EJPN put on a remarkable series of local/regional/national conferences, colloquia, and forums. From these events and ongoing interactions with the dedicated people who conducted them, Gibson drew the greater portion of this book.

This results in a rich spectrum of chapter titles. A random sampling includes: Technology: Opportunity and Peril; Duties to Animals, Plants, Species, and Ecosystems: Challenges for Christians; Let My People Farm; Sustainability and Community; Of Place, Creation, and Relations; Prodigality and Frugality: Core Conflict of the Times; Toxic Pollution and Race; Good Work, the Big Chill, and the Sadness of Dinks. (If you have an antelope’s obsessive curiosity, you may buy the book just to learn what “Dinks” are.)

In these swiftly-changing times one might question the merit of reading speeches and essays conceived, in the majority of cases, so many years ago (Part III was authored recently). However, to back off for that reason would be a serious mistake, for two excellent reasons. (1) The contributors have skillfully identified fundamental cultural flaws and have offered wise alternative paradigms which are, in spite of their urgency, relatively timeless; and (2) The time interval between then and the present is sufficient to validate the authors’ prescience as to where the prevailing sociological/economic/ecological paradigm is taking us.

This book is not for those seeking warm fuzzies, nor will it appeal to those hoping for an effortless “Five Easy Steps To Eco-Justice” palliative. It *will* appeal strongly to those who do not shrink from passages such as this:

The course is rocky, with enormous obstacles. They include not only the short-sighted self-interest of the powerful but also the deep, pervasive assumptions of our culture about progress and growth, the good life, and the relationship of humankind with

nature.

They will find renewed resolve, as I have, in a concluding pronouncement by Gibson:

I live with hope because I find meaning and joy, excitement and adventure, companionship and community, and many small and large satisfactions by participating in God's project, the eco-justice journey.



An easy way to order books

If you find books mentioned here or elsewhere that you want to get for yourself, try going to the Witherspoon website, to <http://www.witherspoon.society.org/books.htm>

From there you can search for what you want and order it – usually at a discount! – from Amazon.com. And Witherspoon will get a little percentage of the price of each book you order. So help yourself and help us all at the same time!

And when you see books mentioned on our website, you'll usually find a link to order them directly.

A review by Gene TeSelle

Credo, by William Sloane Coffin (Westminster-John Knox Press, \$14.95 hard cover)

William Sloane Coffin was perhaps the leading “public preacher” of his generation. A classmate of the first George Bush at Yale, Coffin had far more varied experience, and far more varied influence than the first George Bush — pianist and singer, liaison with the French and Russian military during WWII, CIA agent, chaplain at Williams College for one contentious year, chaplain at Yale University for many more (in the process of which he entirely altered the image of the college chaplain), participant in the Freedom Rides and confidant of “Martin” (MLK Jr.), opponent of the Vietnam War and founder of Clergy and Laity Concerned, pastor of Riverside Church, president of Sane/Freeze, agitator even during his “retirement” in Vermont. His combination of faith, learning, and activism is very Presbyterian.

There are several books by and about Coffin. This one is different, consisting of “wit and wisdom” excerpts collected by Stephanie Egnotovich by poring through his many sermons and speeches. It should not be a surprise that “blurbs” on the dust jacket have been written by Bill Moyers, Garry Trudeau, Ellen Goodman, and Marian Wright Edelman. Barbara Wheeler reports that at Union Seminary there was a book party recently, with Meryl Streep and Daniel Day Lewis joining the usual theologues, and Bill Coffin was “in great form, despite his very serious health problems.”

Coffin has a distinct preaching style, always to the point, driven by an irrepressible energy and sense of adventure. The content is never hateful or selfish, always generous and self-giving. The attitude penetrating his discourse is not that “the world owes me a living” but that “I owe the world and God a life” (12).

He loves to turn a thought inside out: “what distortion of the gospel it is to have limited sympathies and unlimited certainties, when the very reverse — to have limited certainties and unlimited sympathies — is not only more tolerant but far more Christian” (144). “God is always beckoning us toward horizons we aren’t sure we want to reach” (146); and “faith in Jesus Christ, far from diminishing the risks, inspires the courage to take them on — all of them, including the risk of intellectual uncertainty” (144). He relishes the recklessness of faith: “First you leap, and then you grow wings” (7). And it is not done without counting the costs. It’s one thing, Coffin says, to scorn pleasure like a sourpuss; it’s another “gently to lay aside a pleasure, recognizing that a lot of things have gently to be laid aside in this world if we are to seek the pearl of great price” (124).

This spirit of venture and self-dedication has found expression, of course, not only in Coffin’s preaching but in his life, and he urges others to do the same. “It’s so much easier to beat your breast than to stick your neck out” (18). “Hope resists, hopelessness adapts” (19). And there are direct political implications, of course: “you cannot set the captive free if you are not willing to confront those who hold the keys” (43). “Love your enemies” does not mean “Don’t make any” (67, 152).

Coffin has much to say about the present evil age in the U.S. When the U.S. tries to “lead the world” but refuses to “join it” (84); when the real “axis of evil” is “environmental degradation, pandemic poverty, and a world awash with weapons” (111); when conservatives “appeal to the political center by attacking the moral center” (36); when economic interests “make even governments more accountable to the market than to their own citizens” (68); when the common good is identified with “the good of those in power” (73); when “enrich thyself” is the prevailing ethos — then “common integrity is made to look like courage.” He goes on, “In the words of a le Carré character, ‘You have

to think like a hero to behave like a decent human being” (60)

And yet his is a politics of hope. If “politics is the art of the possible,” it is also “the art of making possible tomorrow what seems impossible today” (70). This is not a naive hope. Like Reinhold Niebuhr at the beginning of *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, he says, “Democracy is not based on the proven goodness of the people but on the proven evil of dictators” (103). And yet the best answer to this problem, he says, is increased participation by all the people. He reminds us that twenty of the twenty-six amendments to the Constitution mandate “an extension of democracy” (44). If it is true that “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” another overlooked form of corruption is “failure to assume responsibility for power,” “the indifference and negligence of the many” (52).

He finds Christological grounding for this hopefulness: “. . . if Jesus never allowed his soul to be cornered into despair, and if it was to those furthest from the seats of power that he said, ‘You are the salt of the earth, . . . you are the light of the world’— who then are we to quit ‘fighting the good fight of faith’?” (114)

He interprets Jesus’ saying about children in a new way: “It’s children who want to save the seals, the whales, and all the rest of us to boot. It’s kids who sell cookies for causes, bake bread for brotherhood, save pennies to fight pollution. . . . But . . . we encourage them to outgrow it, as though generosity were a pair of short pants. Do you think Jesus would bless that view of growing up?” (127)

Internal Christian debates enter the picture, too. “The problem is not how to reconcile homosexuality with scriptural passages that condemn it, but rather how to reconcile the rejection and punishment of homosexuality with the love of Christ” (39), for “everything biblical is not Christ-like” (159).

There are words that speak to our

concerns about the unity of the church: “. . . in joining a church you leave home and home town to join a larger world. . . . By joining a church you declare your individuality in the most radical way in order to affirm community on the widest possible scale” (142-43). “Church is where all hearts are one so that nothing else has to be one” (149).

Finally, there are reflections on growing old. It is possible, despite Dylan Thomas, to go gentle into the good night (167). “The more we do God’s will, the less unfinished business we leave behind when we die” (169). “Until a river finds its banks it hasn’t a prayer of being anything but shallow” (167).

But now let these quotations be teasers for reading the book. It should be helpful for inquirers, preachers, discussion groups, and private meditation and motivation.

At the company water cooler, a man bragged about his children’s world travels: one son was teaching in Bolivia, another was working in southern Italy, and my daughter was completing a year-long research project in India.

One co-worker’s response, however, stopped him short.

“What is it about you,” he asked, “that makes your kids want to get so far away?”

Your gift will make a difference!

As we face immense challenges in our church and our world, please consider a donation to the Witherspoon Society. As we approach the 2004 General Assembly, we hope you can consider a special contribution to support our work there and throughout the year. We’ve got a variety of ways you can help make a difference:

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

Want more information?

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

The Society thanks you!

Witherspoon News

Don't forget our annual business meeting, immediately following our luncheon at GA, on Sunday, June 27.

Electing officers

One major item on the agenda of Witherspoon's annual meeting, which will be held immediately following the Witherspoon Luncheon on Sunday, June 27 at General Assembly, will be to confirm the election of new members of the Executive Committee.

According to our by-laws, officers are elected by ballot, not at the Annual Meeting itself. The reason for this is simply to be sure that all members of the organization can vote, whether or not they attend the Assembly.

A list of the nominees for the coming year, and a mail-in ballot, are on the other side of this page.

We hope you'll pay attention, cast your ballot thoughtfully, suggesting alternate names if you feel that's necessary, and offering suggestions for future years.

Are you on our Witherspoon members e-list?

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

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

Please send your current e-mail address to douking2@aol.com

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

Introducing this year's Wareham Intern at General Assembly

Each year the Witherspoon Society selects an outstanding Presbyterian seminary student to assist us in our work at GA, and to learn something about our church from that experience.

This year's intern, Heather Shortlidge, will be graduating this spring from Union-PSCE in Richmond. We've asked her to introduce herself to all who may meet her during the Assembly — perhaps at the Witherspoon booth, at other Witherspoon events, or anywhere else.

Hi. I'm thrilled to be the Witherspoon Intern for the 2004 General Assembly. The prospect of sharing and learning with you makes me look forward to June's speedy arrival.

I will graduate with an M.Div. from Union-PSCE in May. This past year I have worked as the urban intern at First Presbyterian, crossing tradition and social class in attempts to build a self-sustainable bridge between the church and a transitional housing non-profit for homeless women and children. I spent the month of January exploring culture and Christianity in Ghana, West Africa. At the end of August, I will begin a twelve month CPE residency at the Children's Medical Center of Dallas. Pretty exciting stuff for a Yankee from Pennsylvania who accepted an exploratory scholarship to seminary without a clue of what it would lead to.

My first GA experience was in Denver last year as a Theological Seminary Advisory Delegate. This year, I look forward to an affiliation with fellow doers of justice, and to the learning it will afford. I recently walked in solidarity with over a million others for the well-being of all women, all over the world in the March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C. The experience has intensified my realization that one cannot be a single issue activist.

I'm honored to serve as your intern. Safe travels to Richmond.

Grace and Peace,
Heather Shortlidge

If you sent in your ballot from the last issue, thanks! If you haven't done that, now's your chance - assuming you're a member!

Vote for Witherspoon officers!

Please write in the name of anyone you would like to vote for in preference to the nominee.

President (for 2004-2006):

_____ Kenneth R. Smith

.....

Vice President (for 2004-2005)

_____ Jake Young

.....

Membership Coordinator (2004-2006):

_____ John Harris

.....

At-Large members (2004-2006):

(two to be elected; vote for as many as two)

_____ Vanessa Aja-Sigmon

_____ Chuck McLain

.....

And if you'd like to suggest any Witherspoon member (including yourself!) for consideration for next year's officer election, please write their names and contact information here:

.....

.....

.....

Members of the Nominating Committee: Lynne Reade, chair, José Olagues, Donald L. Smith, and Jake Young (liaison)

Please cast your vote!!

Send your ballot *by June 15* to

Lynne Reade

3610 Dunbar Court

Fremont, CA 94536

or e-mail to lynnereade@comcast.net

Nominations for Executive Committee

The following people have been nominated for open positions on Witherspoon Society's Executive Committee. Election will be held at the Annual Meeting held during General Assembly in June, 2004. In accordance with our Bylaws, these are for two-year terms beginning at the conclusion of the Fall Executive Committee meeting in 2004.

President - **Kenneth R. Smith**

Vice President - **Jake Young**

Membership Coordinator - **John Harris**

Member at Large - **Vanessa Aja-Sigmon**

Member at Large - **Charles McLain**

Ken Smith and Jake Young are currently serving on the Executive Committee in other capacities.

About the candidates:

- **Ken Smith** has served as Vice President for the past four years. Before that, he was one of the officers of Semper Reformanda.
- **Jake Young** has served as Member at Large and Membership Coordinator. He is an Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, IL.
- **John E. Harris** currently serves as Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Buckhannon, WV, and Special Presbyter for Quadrant Ministries – Quadrant 2 of West Virginia Presbytery.
- **Vanessa Aja-Sigmon** is a second-year student at McCormick Seminary, living with her husband in Chicago.
- **Chuck McLain** is an Honorably Retired member of San Francisco Presbytery and will be a Commissioner at G.A. in Richmond.

The ballot that accompanies this notice allows members to write in the name of anyone you would like to vote for in preference to a particular nominee. Please make good use of those empty lines at the bottom of the ballot; tell us about people who might make good candidates next time around! (Don't be modest about suggesting yourself.)

If the Nominating Committee selections are approved, this would constitute the new Executive Committee serving in 2005:

President - **Kenneth R. Smith**

Vice President - **Jake Young**

Treasurer - David Zuverink

Secretary/Communicator - Trina Zelle

Issues Analyst - Eugene TeSelle

Membership Coordinator - **John Harris**

Member at Large - Jennifer Stone

Member at Large - Celeste Lasich

Member at Large - **Vanessa Aja-Sigmon**

Member at Large - **Charles McLain**

(Doug King does not require election since it is our good fortune that he continues as Staff.)

Respectfully submitted by the Nominating Committee:

Lynne Reade, Chair; José Olagues, Donald Smith, Jake Young (liaison)

The
Next
Network
News

If you haven't been acquainted with the Witherspoon Society, welcome! We hope you've found something of interest in this special pre-Assembly issue of our newsletter, and we look forward to meeting you in Richmond.

And we would love to hear from you – getting acquainted during the Assembly, and letting us know your impressions (of Witherspoon, and even more of the Assembly and what goes on there).

Whether you're a member or not, we would welcome your reflections on the Assembly as contributions to the next issue of *Network News*, which will provide reports and commentary from the Assembly.

**Deadline for submissions
is
August 1, 2004**

Please let us hear from you!

Network News Editor
Doug King
1418 Clarendon Drive
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FAX: 952-473-2716
E-mail: dougking2@aol.com

**We invite you to
join us!**

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Presbyterians,
witnessing and working
for God's world in the
new century,
we may provide you with
information, theological
reflection, and compan-
ionship on the journey.**

**Just use the return
envelope in the center of
this newsletter, or contact
our
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Jake Young
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Springfield, IL 62701
W - 217-528-4311
H - 217-787-0938
E-mail:
jake@first-pres-church.org

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- _____ **copies of this issue**
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- _____ copies of the Summer 2003 issue, reporting on the 215th General Assembly
- _____ copies of the Winter, 2002 issue, with material from the Stony Point Conference on the Confession of 1967
- _____ copies of the special Fall '99 issue on **Working for Economic Justice**

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

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

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

TOTAL: \$ _____

My check to "Witherspoon Society" is enclosed

Name: _____

Address: _____

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

Phone: _____
(in case of questions)

Return this form to:
Doug King, editor
1418 Clarendon Drive
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