

PAX AMERICANA
How shall we live faithfully in the New American Empire?

The New American Empire

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The President's Corner

Facing the new world of American Empire

by Kent Winters-Hazelton, president

George W. Bush recently announced that we would need \$87,000,000,000 for military deployment and reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan. In an evening address to the nation, he laid out for the people who would have to pay for this adventure the costs confronting them. However, as one observer noted, those who would pay for this war had already been put to bed by their parents.

Outside of military spending and debt repayment, there is little else in the federal government that would cost the American taxpayers as much. For example, the 2002 budget for the Department of Education is \$45.2 billion; the Department of Energy, \$17.2 billion; Housing and Urban Development, \$34.8 billion; Transportation, \$54.9 billion; Environmental Protection, \$7.6 billion; Labor, \$42 billion. Put another way, the cost to establish and maintain the peace in Iraq and Afghanistan would be more than the \$78 billion needed to balance the budgets in all 50 states; more than the \$68 billion for the Homeland Security and State Department combined; more than the Pentagon plans to spend on weapons in 2004. [*Los Angeles Times*, September 8 and 10, 2003].

Apparently, \$87 billion dollars is a lot of money. Once the President announced the figure — subsequently increased in congressional hearings the next day — people began to question the goals and costs of this bungled adventure. Bush embarked on this war stating categorically that Saddam Hussein was linked to the terror attacks of 2001 and that Iraq has massive stacks of weapons of mass destruction. So far no weapons have been found and the administration has admitted that the links did not exist. Bush

said we will not rest until two sworn enemies, Hussein and bin Laden, had been captured. Yet despite the most extensive intelligence-gathering operation in the world, neither has been seen, let alone caught.

Since the President's address, senior administration officials have been barnstorming the country asserting that they were right all along. It reminded me of the argument put forward by the President last fall. It seemed that he kept saying, "Saddam has weapons." Others said, "Did not." "Did too." "Did not." "Did too." Until finally people said, "You know, he makes a fine argument." Now that a majority of the American people question the ongoing mission in Iraq, the President seems to have fallen back on his previous arguments.

Let us not be fooled.. As the Psalmist reminds us,

A king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
The war horse is a vain hope for victory,
and by its great might it cannot save. *Ps 33:16f*



Kent Winters-Hazelton

Thomas Merton, in his book, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, wrote,

A letter arrives stamped with the slogan, "The U.S. Army, key to peace." No army is the key to peace, neither the U.S. Army nor the Soviet Army nor any other. No "great" nation has the key to anything but war. Power has nothing to do with peace. The more men build up military power, the more they violate peace and destroy it. [Doubleday, 1968, 41]

In approving the statement "Iraq and Beyond," the 215th General Assembly took note of the administration's new strategy of "preventive war," which was used to justify the invasion of Iraq, and the long-term goal of "full spectrum dominance."

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The statement articulates the concerns expressed by many in the face of this radical new American policy:

... those who oppose this policy believe that it has the potential to change the nature of international relations even more than acts of terrorism by any other entities. There is a great likelihood that this U.S. policy will tend to increase the anxiety within many nations. They will wonder where the U.S. will choose to strike next. The probability of increased hostility toward the U.S. and its citizens in many places around the world will be greatly increased. The differences in these views raise a number of serious questions that require more thoughtful study and reflection. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. How does a “superpower nation” keep a perspective of moral self-criticism?
2. What are the unique responsibilities and limitations of a “superpower nation?”
3. How does the policy of full spectrum dominance relate to the values of the gospel?
4. How does a “superpower” keep the use of war for national security

and the duty of humanitarian intervention appropriately connected?

5. How can Presbyterians, together with other people of faith, fulfill their responsibility to actively work for peace in relation to this new U.S. military policy?

The challenge of Pax Americana and the new National Security Directive is of great concern to the members and friends of the Witherspoon Society. In this issue of *Network News* we have provided some commentary on the growing militarization of our nation’s foreign policy.

Ross and Gloria Kinsler draw on their wide experience in Latin America show the impact of the current “free market” policies of the United States, and offer theological and programmatic perspectives on how we might respond to this unprecedented exercise of U.S. power.

Rick Ufford-Chase, in his Presbyterian Peace breakfast at the 2003 General Assembly, told stories of the human impact of U.S. power in Mexico and Central America, and pointed to ways the Presbyterian Church might be faithful in this situation.

Gene TeSelle reviews five recent books that trace the web of lies that is being woven by the current Administration to justify radically new policies of U.S. world domination.

Jane Hanna reports on last summer’s Ghost Ranch seminar, which offered a challenging Biblical vision for the future, in the face of the challenges and dangers of America’s global ambitions.

May the peace of Christ be with us all.

The Witherspoon Society Mission

Revised October 2003

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.



The Editor's Spot

Learning from the Coalition

**The Coalition struggles with the question:
To stay or to go?**

I had a new experience early in October: attending the annual gathering of the Presbyterian Coalition – a coming together of the main groups on the conservative side of our church. I went with a bit of uneasiness. After all, how would these folks receive someone coming as “press” from the other side? That’s where I began learning some new things.

First, I discovered that our conservative friends *can* practice hospitality – in some ways as well as more liberal groups take such pride in doing. But that was just the start of my learning.

What surprised me most – though I should have expected it, perhaps – was the depth and bitterness of differences among the conservative groups and their members, especially when it came to the crucial question of the Gathering: whether to leave now, or to continue the struggle to save the soul of the Presbyterian Church. Robert Howard of the Presbyterian Lay Committee put it most clearly in his very detailed proposal for “gracious separation.” He and a few others seem convinced that the denomination is so lost in its heresy and tolerance of “sin” that the only faithful action now is departure.

But on the other side, a number of people spoke of their conviction that efforts must be continued and intensified to purify the PC(USA). This means more judicial proceedings against what they view as heresy and immorality. And more overtures to gain power for conservatives, and to tighten the provisions of the Book of Order and require their enforcement.

I suspect many on the progressive side of the church generally see the negative side of the conservative groups: what we view as false and distorted reporting

of events and programs in the church, attacks on leaders. But I saw a positive side as well: There were those, largely younger pastors, who see departure from the PC(USA) as a real option, but who are talking very positively – and creatively – about possibilities for a new “church for the 21st century.”

Their proposal, which they call “New Wineskins,” emphasizes communication among pastors and congregations at the local level, minimal structure, with no “hierarchy” or top-down control. The minimal national structure would exist primarily to serve congregations, which they see as a sharp contrast to the present structure, where they believe congregations exist simply to serve national agencies. (That is quite different from the reality many of us know, but it reflects frequent complaints from the right.) A lot of this struck me as looking a lot like the Internet: emphasis on information-sharing, no hierarchy, minimal structure. One of the presenters agreed with my idea, with one very big difference: You can participate in the Web, he said, with no conditions, no discipline, no agreement on basic beliefs, no covenantal commitment. And all those things are absolutely central to what is being proposed here. (And of course that’s precisely where the PC(USA) is failing, in the view of this group.)

Another surprise (which may simply show my “liberal” smugness) was hearing the Rev. Jim S. Kim call resoundingly for more focus on issues of justice and less on the “luxury questions” of sexuality. This reflects his own diverse congregation, whose racial-ethnic members struggle daily against injustices of racism and poverty and exclusion. (You’ll find an interesting note from him, responding to Kent Winters-Hazelton’s reflections on the Chicago meeting

called by Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and GAC Executive Director John Dett-erick. *See page 16.*)

Even as some Presbyterians – many of them connected to the *Presbyterian Layman* – seem bent on separation, others seem committed to staying, *if* they can get substantial satisfaction of their own desires for the church. As Kent and Jin and the Chicago conversations suggest, there may be some hope for staying together (at least some of us) if we can find ways to join together in mission.

Can we engage together in mission for justice as well as for sharing the Good News? We’ll have to wait to see – wait with discernment and hope. But there are creative elements in the conservative movements, as well as the negative sides that we know so well. If we can offer some authentic creativity in mission as well, there may yet be hope.

One clear direction emerging from the Witherspoon board meeting in October was our commitment to seek new and creative ways congregations can engage in justice- and peace-making mission in their own communities and the wider world. We invite you to share your ideas and experiences as we pursue this new future!

For more detailed reports from the Coalition Gathering, please check out our website.

You might start by going to <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/coalition%202003.htm>

Or if that’s a bit much, just go to our home page, at www.witherspoonsociety.org

Scroll down near the bottom, and you’ll find a link that will take you there.

PAX AMERICANA

An Inter-American Perspective

by Ross and Gloria Kinsler

For over two years now our mass media and our national government have insistently and incessantly directed our attention to the declared “war on terrorism” with primary attention to the Middle East and the Muslim World. The emergence of “the American Century” and the consolidation of its proponents at the heart of the Bush Administration, however, alert us to the threat of U.S. global military and economic hegemony. So it may be instructive to direct our attention to other regions, especially the Americas, where the threat of U.S. hegemony goes all the way back to the Monroe Doctrine. Having been commissioned by the UPCUSA in 1963 for mission in Central America and re-commissioned by our Central American colleagues in the year 2000 for mission in the U.S.A., we would like to share some of our changing perspectives on peace and some biblical perspectives on peace in response to today’s global crisis.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON PEACE

The history of exploitation, oppression, military repression, and war in Central America during the latter half of the 20th Century is well known to Presbyterians in this country, as is the role of the U.S. government in that region. Our General Assembly undertook, adopted, and circulated to all our churches and presbyteries major studies on the realities of Central America, beginning in 1983 with the report “Adventure and Hope: Christians and the Crisis in Central America.” Some of our congregations were confronted dramatically with the arrival of refugees, especially from Guatemala and El Salvador, who were seeking sanctuary in our churches because our government would not grant them political asylum and could not recognize its complicity in the massacres, torture, and other atrocities that uprooted and displaced hundreds of thousands of innocent people, particularly poor Mayan peasants for most of whom the Cold War was unknown and irrelevant.

The presence of those refugees, most of them undocumented (not illegal!), the reports of numerous delegations of our people who went to Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua to see for themselves, and the intensive work of Witness for Peace, Amnesty International, and other organizations raised the consciousness of many and pressured Washington to give peace a chance. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the last vestige of justification for massive U.S. military support and intervention in Central America gave way, and gradually peace accords were signed, the last in Guatemala in 1996. All of us who were concerned for the well being of the Central American peoples assumed or at least hoped that the peace accords would improve life for those who had suffered so brutally for so long. But what emerged from the ashes was continuing exploitation, oppression, and poverty, now primarily through economic imperialism

directed by the U.S. government and corporations backed up by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization.

Dr. Oscar Arias was President of Costa Rica when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1987 for his decisive role in bringing to a close the wars of Central America. In 1999 he gave a lecture at Dartmouth College on “Globalization and the New Struggle for Peace.” Following are portions from that speech.

While the age of the cold war has ended, it has not been followed by the promised era of peace and prosperity. This is supposed to be a time of peace. But how can we say that there is peace when thousands are made to work in dehumanizing conditions? How can we say there is peace when we build more prisons and fewer schools? How can we say that there is peace when so many go hungry. Today I challenge you to think about peace in a new way. When we demand peace, it must not only be a peace of national security, one which talks bombing and gunfire. It must also be a peace of human security, one concerned with the welfare and health of humanity.

The [globalization] system encourages insatiable consumption and consumerism for some, but denies many others the basic necessities of life.

I tell you that there is a much deeper crisis underlying the financial panic. I say that it is an economic crisis when nearly a billion and a half people have no access to clean water, and a billion live in miserably substandard housing. I say that it is a leadership crisis when we allow wealth to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. . . . I say it is a moral crisis when 40,000 children die each day from malnutrition and disease. And I say it is a democratic crisis when 1.3 billion people live on incomes of less than one dollar a day and in their unrelenting poverty are totally excluded from public decision-making.

The tragedy of Central America is that the peace accords, which brought to an end most of the overt military repression, have not brought about the more basic peace that Dr. Arias has been calling for. Rather, national and international institutions and structures have been put in place to impose economic repression to benefit private and corporate interests at the expense of the majority poor under the rule of “free market” ideology.

This “free market” ideology and economic imperialism have been institutionalized under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico since 1994. The Bush Administration has been pressing for the expansion of NAFTA to embrace all of the Americas (34 countries, 755 million people, with the exception of Cuba), called the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), in spite of the disastrous results of NAFTA, with which is reported to have cost millions of U.S. jobs and in Mexico one million more workers under minimum wage, 8 million more families in poverty, and 44 tons of hazardous waste dumped every day.



Global Exchange summarizes ten reasons to oppose this new threat to the environment, family livelihood, human rights, and democracy through the globalization of “free market” fundamentalism.

1. The FTAA Expands a Proven Disaster.
2. The Agreement is Being Written in Secret.
3. The Agreement Will Undermine Labor Rights and Cause Further Job Loss.
4. The Agreement Will Exacerbate Environmental Destruction.
5. The Agreement Will Put Lives at Risk.
6. The Agreement Will Lead to Privatization of Essential Services.
7. The Agreement Will Provide a Back Door for the Multilateral Agreement on Investments.
8. The Agreement Will Spread the Use of Genetically Modified Organisms.
9. The Agreement Will Increase Poverty and Inequality.
10. There Are Proven Alternatives.

In his stunning analysis, *When Corporations Rule the World* (Kumerian Press, 2001), David Korten explains that “free trade” and the “free market” do not free trade or markets or people or nations. “Rather they free global corporations to plan and organize the world’s economic affairs to the benefit of their bottom line, without regard to public consequences.” (P. 78) The World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank, under the tutelage of our government and the threat of its military might, support this process, which undermines democracy among the Southern countries and amounts to “the re-colonization of Southern economies by transnational corporations.” (P166)

It is the globalization of this power arrangement that presents the two great threats to life in the 21st Century: economic polarization and ecological destruction. As we have heard many times, continuing unrestrained development may well lead to the death of the planet’s biosphere within this century. And extreme poverty takes the lives of 40,000 children every day, as Arias indicates. As U.S. Christians we must examine our biblical foundations and spiritual commitments in the face of the global crises, because we are among the chief decision makers and the main beneficiaries of these realities.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PEACE

One of the clear lessons from Central America’s recent history is that **peace is not just the absence of war but *shalom*, fullness of life for all God’s people**. The foundational experience or paradigm of Israel’s faith, following deliverance from slavery in Egypt, begins with the story of the manna in Exodus 16. God’s response to their hunger in the wilderness was to feed them, yes, but also to teach them that to live in freedom they must learn to share so that everyone would have enough, i.e., none would have too much! For if some were allowed to hoard, others would have less, and this could lead to such deprivation that some might fall back into slavery, which would be a negation of their identity and a

profanation of their faith in the God who delivers. This was the time when Sabbath was introduced, a regular time for the whole household to rest and to remember. This lesson of the manna, of the Sabbath Day, still stands as the most fundamental economic challenge for God’s people.

Another basic biblical lesson is that **peace is not just charity but justice**. This lesson is inscribed in Deuteronomy 15, which sets forth two basic mandates for the Sabbath Year: the cancellation of debts and the freeing of slaves in the seventh year. Clearly economic inequality or injustice is not just personal but structural. In ancient times the main mechanism for the accumulation of wealth and the growth of poverty was the debt system. In spite of anti-usury laws, those who had more and were called upon to loan to poor farmers when they lost their crops were tempted to charge high interest and even to expand their land holdings (capital) when mortgages failed. Those who lost their land often fell into slavery with their families. So the Sabbath Year mandates were intended to resist and reverse those practices so common among other nations. As Deuteronomy 15:4 indicates, “There will be no one in need among you,” which is to say there should be no poverty among God’s people. And Deuteronomy 15:15 provides the rationale: “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today.” Here again the Bible teaches that to practice injustice and exploitation is to deny our identity and profane our faith in the God who liberates, who declares that there should be no poor among us..

The third basic lesson is that **peace is not just religious faith but holistic salvation**. This understanding is especially clear in Leviticus 25, the Jubilee chapter, which mandates that – in the 50th year, the super Sabbath – families who had lost their lands and homes could return and rehabilitate them and so begin anew their lives with dignity and abundance as God desires for all. It is this vision that is taken up and radicalized in Isaiah 61:1-2a and proclaimed and enacted by Jesus, according to Luke 4:16-21. In fact it was put into practice by the early church with the infilling of the Holy Spirit, according to Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35, 5:12-16. They practiced Sabbath economics or Jubilee spirituality as a necessary fulfillment of their identity and their faith in the God who liberates. They shared all their possessions and distributed them as any had need so that “there was not a needy person among them.” (Acts 4:34)

Once the Sabbath-Jubilee paradigm is discovered, it opens up new understanding of many biblical texts, especially in the Synoptic Gospels. Take the Lord’s Prayer, as one example. Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God’s name be hallowed, God’s Reign come, and God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven, as the first three petitions indicate. Then he added three very concrete petitions about how they were to make that happen through their own lives. “Give us this day our daily bread” is clearly a reference to the lesson of the manna and the Sabbath Day, for it uses the plural, which means all of us, all of God’s people. To pray this petition is to commit ourselves to the elimination of poverty and hunger so that all will have enough to eat. It means to reject the accumulation of wealth and to move into

a life-style of sharing.

The next petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," is clearly a reiteration of the Sabbath Year mandates, for it too is in plural. To pray this petition is to commit ourselves to the elimination of onerous and unpayable Third World debt, of predatory lending in this country, and of all those unjust mechanisms that make the rich richer and the poor poorer and more numerous. It is to commit ourselves to work for economic justice and the elimination of massive inequities in our country and in our world.

The final petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil," must today surely include the almost overwhelming pressure to accumulate, to consume, and to display in a culture that constantly proclaims "You deserve it" and "You are what you have." For it is this temptation that leads to the evil that drives the engines of our local and global economy and leads to unconscionable poverty and marginalization in this country and around the world.

The PC(USA) offers many avenues of response to the challenge of peacemaking as we have described it here, in terms of today's world and biblical teaching. In light of the national and global economic crisis we would like to recommend a fundamental, not marginal, commitment to the Presbyterian Hunger Program, which offers a comprehensive range of possibilities for responsible discipleship. To our minds the challenge of economic justice and peacemaking belongs at the very core of our faith and worship. As followers of Jesus we are called to bring good news to the poor, which surely means that they will no longer be poor if all of us learn to practice Sabbath economics/Jubilee spirituality. Likewise we are called, like Jesus, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. This is our Sabbath/Jubilee calling; this is what it means "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." The Hunger Program proposes the following dimensions for this our calling.

Hunger Education and Interpretation. *Learning about hunger and our response to it begins with the Bible.*

Direct Food Relief. *As Christians we demonstrate our love for sisters and brothers by supporting programs which ensure that food is available to those in need, while also working on longer-term solutions.*

Development Assistance. *The PHP encourages and supports land ownership by the poor, appropriate agricultural technology, rural community development, cooperative economic development, effective soil conservation, water resource development, equitable food distribution, community organizing, and nutrition education.*

Public Policy Advocacy. *It supports organizations and coalitions which advocate for public policies that provide food for poor and hungry people and empower their self-development.*

Lifestyle Integrity. *In this world where some go hungry because others consume too much, the PHP encourages families, church groups, and institutions to evaluate their own needs and develop new ways of being more caring and sharing of the world's resources in obedience to the Gospel.*

Attached to the Hunger Program is a new unit in Louisville called Enough for Everyone, which engages our churches in basic steps toward economic justice in terms of the coffee we drink, the clothes we wear, the energy we use, and the money we invest. Such basic steps can lead to ever greater understanding of the world's crises and of the biblical message we affirm, through the leading of God's Spirit.

At the height of the wars in Central America some colleagues began to talk about the peace of empire, which was largely the imposition of absolute military repression and death, and the peace of the peoples, which was the hoped for freedom to work the land, raise families, value ancient cultural traditions, and worship the God of life without military, political, and economic threats. Latin Americans today join with peoples around the world in demanding the peace of the peoples (shalom), in rejecting *Pax Americana* (empire).

The authors:

Ross Kinsler and his wife Gloria were coworkers in mission for the Presbyterian church for over twenty-five years as theological educators in Central America. They retired a couple years ago from teaching at the Latin American Biblical University in San José, Costa Rica.

Empire and Church: Pitfalls and Priorities for the Presbyterian Church in a time of Globalization

Rick Ufford-Chase

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Breakfast
215th General Assembly May 28, 2003

Rick Ufford-Chase is the founder and international director of BorderLinks, a cross-border educational organization based in Tucson, Arizona.

He began by reading Mark 5: 1-20 – the account of Jesus' healing of the Gerasene Demoniac.

He continued by describing:

Life under the American empire

We live in the time of empire. Two weeks ago, I had the opportunity to visit with the members of a newly formed Presbytery in the coffee growing region of the volcanic mountain chain, called the Boca Costa, in southwestern Guatemala. I was accompanying a delegation from Immanuel Presbyterian Church in McLean, Virginia. As we arrived at the Presbyterian Church in the town of Chocolá, Suchitepequez, twenty-five or thirty men and women and young people came forward to greet us under a large sign that said welcome in English, Spanish, and Quiché. They sang a hymn to welcome us in both Spanish and Quiché, and then invited us to sit around a table that stretched some fifty feet on the veranda in front of the church. As they served us bowls of fresh mango, papaya, banana, and watermelon, they told us their story. "This is a region where we have always worked on the coffee plantations." explained Cristobal Escobar, the moderator of the small, new Presbytery of just seven churches. "Life has always been hard here. But in the last few years, the price of coffee in the world market has fallen so low that it doesn't pay the plantation owners even to harvest the crop of coffee beans." If you manage to find a job working on a plantation, the typical wage is 15 to 25 quetzales a day, or roughly two to three dollars. The challenge confronted by Presbyterians in

this rural community became clearer as one of the women explained that many of the young people are leaving. There is nothing for them in the piedmont region of Guatemala's volcanoes, so as they become teenagers, they leave for Guatemala City.

When they arrive in the city, they find jobs in the factories of the global economy, especially in the textile or food processing industry, which pay a subsistence wage. That wage might be enough to send a little bit of money home, but their parents are extremely worried that the dangers of the big city are putting their kids at risk. They fear for their children because of the high level of violent crime. In Guatemala City it is a routine occurrence for someone to be brutally murdered for a cell phone. The gang activity is an everyday fact of life for all of us who live in the city, because as urban teenagers confront the reality that they have no future, many opt out, making crime the biggest growth industry. As in so many other places, the temptations of prostitution as a way to make money fast are often irresistible. If they do manage to find a job in one of the factories producing for export, they are paid roughly 300 quetzales a week, about forty U.S. dollars. To give you a sense of perspective, that's how much my wife and I are paying for a very simple, small apartment with two rooms and no hot water. The young adults of the Boca Costa quickly learn the brutal lessons of urban poverty. You can choose to pay the rent, or buy food to eat, but too often, you can't afford to do both.

These problems may seem like an abstraction, but later, as I spoke with him in private, Cristobal wept as he told me about his nineteen-year-old daughter who went to the city last year was hit by a car and killed at the end of July.

Guatemala is on the leading edge of the same, massive, rural to urban, and south to north, migration that I have witnessed in Mexico over the last twenty years. Thirty years ago, Mexico's population was 75% rural. Today it is 75% urban. Where I work on the U.S./Mexico border that means life in a one or two room house you build yourself out of wood pallets and cardboard, on a twenty by sixty foot plot of land, on the side of a ravine. It means you work 48 hours a week for a paycheck of about fifty dollars (including bonuses) as a line worker in the global factory. Or, maybe, if you have a family, you are more like my friends Martin and Leticia who live in Agua Prieta, Sonora, with their three daughters. While Martin's mother takes care of the girls, he works ninety hours a week, and for Leticia seventy-five hours a week is typical. Between them their take home pay is still less than \$200 per week. The real problem is that in addition to becoming global laborers, they have also become global consumers as they have moved to the city, creating an untenable situation in which they are paid in pesos, but they consume in dollars. For example, in Nogales, a gallon of milk costs more than three dollars, or roughly three hour's wage. In Guatemala City, a large box of corn flakes costs about 26 quetzales, almost a full day's wage.

These are the signs of empire in our time. Countries across Latin America are lining up to sign free trade agreements with the empire, eliminating trade barriers to give foreign corporations full access to their markets, while tariffs and industries heavily subsidized by the governments in the U.S. or Canada make it impossible for them to open new markets themselves. This creates the cruelest of ironies; even as a country's macroeconomic stability grows and their gross domestic product rises under the conditions of free trade, more and more people end up living in poverty, or, like the people of the Boca Costa, in misery.

A Presbyterian Elder named Rodrigo whom I met a few weeks ago explained that even in the United States there are complaints about the openness to public participation, transparency, and demo-

cratic process, or lack of those things, in the Free Trade Negotiations. But in his country, with high levels of illiteracy, the legacy of impunity and lack of accountability of governmental officials, and civil society's inability to give their input in decision making, those who will be most affected by the agreements have no voice at all in the negotiations.

Here's the problem with the way free trade typically plays out. Just up the road about fifty kilometers from the coffee region of the Boca Costa, I met another group of Presbyterian Women in a small community near Quetzaltenango. A few years ago, supported by a Presbyterian sponsored development program, the women began cultivating one acre gardens with potatoes, on the theory that potatoes were a cash crop with a local market that could provide supplemental income for their families. However, in the last year the market has been flooded with cheap potatoes from Canada, and these local families are discovering that once again they are left with a crop that has little or no value.

On May 5, three articles ran side-by-side in Guatemala's largest newspaper, *La Prensa*. On page 6: a picture of four malnourished children, one of them carrying a baby, on a plantation in the Boca Costa region. The title was, "Abandoned on the Farms" and the subtitle "Forgotten on the coffee plantations of San Marcos, hundreds suffer from hunger, malnutrition, sickness and unemployment." On page 5: a story about the investigation of President Portillo in Guatemala, and a dozen or so other high level government officials, for diverting millions of government dollars to private bank accounts in Panama. And on page 28: a picture of the Pope with the headline "Globalization should seek the common good," and a box highlighting the Pope's words, "Personal interests and the demands of the market frequently overshadow the concept of the common good. We must have controls and rules in order to convert the process of globalization into a benefit for all of humanity."

This is the face of empire in our time, and it is entirely dependent on the force of military power that backs it up. There is a

reason the phrase "military industrial complex" has become a common part of our lexicon. In the words of Thomas Friedman in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, McDonalds must be backed up by McDonald Douglas.

There is no more powerful symbol of that military might and how it protects our economic interests in the world today, than the U.S./Mexico border. Some 10,000 Border Patrol agents, sixteen-foot-high steel barriers, and thousands of four-wheel drive vehicles are employed in my part of the world in order to, in the words of several Border Patrol Agents with whom I've spoken, "protect your way of life." They are clear, even if you and I are not, about the relationship between our standard of living in the United States and the show of force necessary not only to protect us from the desperate hordes who would threaten us, but also to keep those people in the 2/3's, undeveloped world where they will be willing to work for poverty wages in the fields, the greenhouses and the factories of the empire.

...

There is a Presbyterian Church in Nogales Sonora, pastored by Dr. Jorge Pasos. Sol de Justicia Church provides a meal five nights a week for deported migrants. These are men and women who have been picked up by the Border Patrol and returned to the city of Nogales, Sonora. They have nothing: no money, no options, and no place to go. Worst of all, their dignity has been robbed and many lack the courage to return to families whose hopes had been pinned on their success.

This is what it means to be one of those on the margins of the empire.

The border that so many people have died trying to cross is the gulf that divides the twenty percent of the world's population – that's you and me – who will have a seat at the table of globalization, from the remaining eighty percent of the world's population who are the laborers who will serve our interests. If you are on the wrong side of that border, you are the people living under occupation, serving the interests of the empire of the first

world. These are the people serving the empire.

How can the Church be faithful?

The question, for all of us, is how must we be church in the heart of that empire? This is where I would like to turn to the story of the Gerasene Demoniac.

This story begins with the words, "They came to the other side of the sea. . . ." Jesus and his disciples are moving out into the world of the unknown, the world of the gentiles. Even getting here has been scary for them, as they've passed through a tremendous storm on the sea in the middle of the night, and have almost foundered. And now, at Jesus' insistence, they are about to go against everything they have been taught. The gentiles are heathen, they are unclean, they are not God's chosen people, and the Hebrew people are to have nothing to do with them.

And immediately as they step out of the boat, they are met by a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit. The danger they feared has already found them. And what is the danger? A terrifying, overpowering man who cannot be restrained. "Many times they had bound him in chains, but chains he wrenched apart and shackles he broke into pieces."

What the story immediately brings to mind in a post 9-11 world is the violence of terrorism. This man inhabits the unknown world of the tombs. He lives by himself, and no one really knows what goes on up there on the hill. The man is angry, raging, and his violence is beyond anything that these people have experienced before, beyond anything they know how to cope with. Perhaps, reflecting on Mark's words that he was always howling and bruising himself with stones, it might bring to mind the incomprehensible actions of the suicide bomber. It is what we don't understand about the Gerasene Demoniac that makes him genuinely terrifying.

And so we try to subdue him with shackles and chains, with bombs and tanks and economic sanctions and homeland security, but no matter what we

do, it just gets scarier. Why? I believe it is because we are dealing with symptoms - the Gerasene's violent behavior. And as we have responded with violence, much like the story of the Gerasene Demoniac, things have only gotten worse. We don't feel any safer.

I want to share to share the words of Jean Paul Lederach, in his essay "The Challenge of Terror," written the week after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The first and most important question to pose to ourselves is relatively simple though not easy to answer:

How do people reach this level of anger, hatred and frustration? (To say) that they are brainwashed by a perverted leader who holds some kind of magical power over them is an escapist simplification and will inevitably lead us to very wrong-headed responses. Anger of this sort, what we could call generational, identity-based anger, is constructed over time through a combination of historical events, a deep sense of threat to identity, and direct experiences of sustained exclusion. . . We should be careful to pursue one and only one thing as the strategic guidepost of our response: Avoid doing what they expect. What they expect from us is the lashing out of the giant against the weak, the many against the few. This will reinforce their capacity to perpetuate the myth they carefully seek to sustain: That they are under threat, fighting an irrational and mad system that has never taken them seriously and wishes to destroy them and their people. What we need to destroy is their myth - not their people.

Lederach's words give me new insight into Jesus' actions in our story. Think about how radical Jesus' response is. Instead of helping to restrain the demoniac, Jesus names the evil that is tormenting the man. Its name is Legion, the name of the occupying military of the Roman Empire, the military might necessary to back up an insatiable force seeking power and wealth. This is a

military that occupies the land, represses the people, and directs the entire economy - all the means of the generation of wealth - for the enrichment of the empire. Sounds to me like a good description of economic globalization in our time.

And so the demon, the forces of empire, beg Jesus not to send them "out of the country." We can reach an agreement, the demon says, we can occupy your land in a less violent and less-abusive way. Don't make us give up the foundation of our wealth, the core of what we perceive to be not just our well-being, but the well-being of everyone. If you'll be patient, the way of empire will turn out to be good for all of us. Besides, who can really imagine anything else?

Jesus can. He casts out the demon into a herd of two thousand swine, and in so doing, he calls into question the very basis of the empire economy. The swine, cared for by a people under occupation, probably the lowest of the low in that society, and owned by wealthy Gerasenes who have figured out how to grow rich in an empire economy, are sent over a cliff to drown in the sea. And in that moment, Jesus becomes a dangerous subversive, not just among the religious leaders of his own people, but now as an enemy of empire. He will be feared by the poor, people like Leticia and Martin, because they are right on the edge of desperation and they'll be afraid of anything that might further threaten their ability to care for their family. If there are no swine, what do the swineherds do? He will be despised by the powerful among those under occupation, the President Portillos, because they have found a way to be big winners as the agents of empire. What will the owners of the swine do? Most of all, he will be seen as a radical and the worst kind of subversive by the rulers of the empire, those who have the most to lose if there is no longer a way to pacify the Gerasenes through military domination.

Casting out the demon of Empire

So the question for all of us is "What would it mean today to grasp Jesus'

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

I believe these are the foundational principles of that paradigm:

- In a secure world, a day's wage will be enough to provide for the basic needs of one's family, everywhere, period.
- In a secure world, my use of the world's resources will be appropriate and measured so that I am not destroying the environment where someone else lives, or where our children or our grandchildren will live.
- In a secure world, my lifestyle in the United States will be balanced and sane so that there can be no perception that my family's well being has come at the expense of another family on the other side of the world.
- In a secure world, our country's notion of justice will change. As Quaker philosopher/rancher Jim Corbett would have said, we will need to create community based on the values of cohesion rather than community built on coercion. Gently put, we will learn the art of negotiation and consensus building. We will forego the too-easy solutions that come with the threat of a gun.
- In a secure world, there will be no profit in providing military, police, prison and guard "security" to protect us. We will begin to put those profits into the things that really do build strong, safe, communities. Good housing, basic education, good health care, community infrastructure - and we will work to make that happen for everyone, all over the world. That's what security is all about.

What must we do?

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

First, we must stand for basic, uncompromising, economic security – for all the world’s citizens – in the midst of globalization. How we respond to economic empire building is going to be the defining moral challenge of our time. The church, our church, must be in the center of that debate. We should be on the streets of Seattle and Quebec to insist on democratic participation in shaping our economic relationships. We must be sitting at the conference tables of the wealthy nations as they negotiate the rules of free trade agreements. We’ll need to be at the workshops of Porto Alegre, Brazil with eighty thousand people from across the world as they dare to imagine that “Another World is Possible.” We need to be a voice of reason and conscience in the board rooms of the corporations to stand firm for the values of equity and dignity for all of us. Most importantly, we must do the hard work of educating Presbyterians about the Biblical mandate for economic justice and Jesus’ radical notions of security. It’s called MAKING DISCIPLES!

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

I have no illusions that the Presbyterian Church (USA) is going to become a peace church, or a pacifist community, any time soon, although I dare to dream that day is in my future. However, we can and should be creating new, viable, non-violent alternatives to militarization. Our Church can and should be a voice of reason holding our nation to the highest

standard of proof that there IS NO OTHER WAY before it uses military force. Our Church can and should help to build a non-violent peace army that is willing to stand in the midst of violence, putting our own lives at risk in the same way that we expect our soldiers to. In doing so, we will force the proponents of violence to think twice about what they are doing, and bring a new level of consequence to their actions. There are thirty-five wars being fought right now in different parts of the world, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) should be there as a nonviolent, direct intervention on behalf of peace. When things become dangerous, Presbyterians should be flocking to those places to insist that every life of every child in Iraq, or Palestine, or Israel, or Colombia, anywhere in the world, is just as sacred as the life of my own son, Teo. Until we are willing to show that kind of courage, there can be no casting out of the demon of military-backed empire.

Michael Nagler, in his book *Is There No Other Way?*, describes the situation in 1942, when India was cowering before the prospect of a Japanese invasion. He writes that Gandhi startled everyone by proposing that India could defend herself with nonviolent armies of peace. While Churchill was trying to prepare Roosevelt for a British collapse, Gandhi was “preparing his unarmed countrymen to resist to the last man rather than submit, if the Japanese had landed on Indian soil.” He was never given a chance to put this bold vision to the test. As Nagler says, the British put him in prison, conveniently, for most of the war years, and even most of his own Congress Party members found they were not ready to follow him that far. Historically, Nagler reflects, wars always thin the ranks of pacifists. When danger stares one in the face, it is difficult to keep faith with an untested future. (page 242)

Our task as the faithful church in the heart of empire will be not only to keep faith with an untested future, but to create new possibilities so that there are an array of possible responses beyond “Shock and Awe.”

As the year comes to an end, your gift will make a difference!

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

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The Society thanks you!



And look at Mark's vision for what might happen if we live into that future. How do the people react to Jesus' radical act of attacking the empire economy? They come from the towns and the villages to see what Jesus has done, and they find the man formerly possessed by demons now unchained, clothed, calm, and in his right mind. He is no longer threatened by the empire's military. His reason for that unbelievable, unreasoning rage has left him, and there is no violence left in him.

Unfortunately for the people of the surrounding towns and villages, that means there is also nothing left to be afraid of. And it makes them more afraid, doesn't it? The distraction of terrorism is gone. There is nothing left to mask the reality, which is that they are a people living under the domination of empire as well, and that any ability they themselves had carved out to make a way of life in that system is no longer secure. No wonder they felt threatened. For some of them, they have quite a bit to lose. The owners of the swine, the investors in the defense corporations that were subsidized by empire, the consumers of the cheap goods of the global economy, those of us whose lives are connected in unseen ways to the producers in the global supermarket and the workers of the global factory. It's going to take real courage to imagine our lives without the benefits we receive from the empire. Even more challenging, the Gerasene, formerly possessed by the demon, is now in his right mind. He wants to join Jesus on the journey, but Jesus tells him his task is elsewhere. His responsibility is to share the message of what God has done for him with his friends. What a curious statement. I assumed that this man had no friends. Remember, he had been isolated, wild and uncontrollable, and no one could go near him. So where is Jesus sending him?

I think he's been sent into the land of the military occupation, to the few winners and the many losers of the project of empire building, to tell the story of Jesus' critique and the drowning of the pigs. Jesus is asking him to become an evangelist in the most risky and daring sense of the word: to share Jesus' message of salvation; a new kind of

relationship with God; liberation in the heart of the empire.

In our world, Jesus is asking us in the church to take similar risks. Jesus' image of wholeness, of the Gerasene clothed and in his right mind, is attainable. All we have to do to get there is to have the courage, here in the heart of empire, to stand against the notion of a global economy without the responsibility of a global community.

So what's the good news?

The good news is that this is what the gospel is all about. This is the message that so excited the early church. Jesus did preach good news, and the good news was that God wants us – all of us – to have life, and life abundantly. As we become enthusiastic evangelists who are unafraid to share what really is the good news of Jesus Christ, the church around us will come alive. We will be on fire with the Christ-centered vision of our faith, our church and our world.

The good news of Jesus, shared unabashedly, is that security will never be found at the barrel of a gun: not in Iraq, not in Colombia, not on the U.S./Mexico border, and not in our own communities. The kind of security we seek can only be claimed as we adopt Jesus' command to first remove the log from our own eye, and to examine the violence we perpetrate all over the world in everyday ways that are unseen to us, but completely obvious to our brothers and sisters all over the world who are our unintended victims.

The good news of Jesus Christ, shared without reservation, is that Jesus dared to imagine a world in which there was basic economic fairness and security. Isn't it amazing that in our Presbyterian Church USA that statement borders on the heretical. We've been taught a theology of economics that in many ways is the antithesis of the theology of Jesus Christ. That there are always winners and losers. That there is no need to examine where our wealth comes from as long as we share it generously with those who are less fortunate. In many churches, we're exposed week after week

to a theology of entitlement, seeking always to interpret our scripture in a way that won't call into question our pre-existing values.

In the end, however, that theology leaves us feeling strangely empty, wondering if there isn't more, and watching as other congregants leave to look elsewhere for meaning in their lives. There is good news for the poor in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And if we believe in Jesus' message of the power of grace, it is also good news for all of us who are not poor, but who are willing to ask profound and difficult questions about how we live our lives and who God is calling us to be. If we can let go of the piece of the empire we've managed to grab, perhaps there is something deeper out there for us; perhaps the longing we feel for meaning and community can be satisfied.

Finally, what I most appreciate about this story is that it is simultaneously profoundly personal and radically corporate. The story of the Gerasene Demoniac is, in the end, a story of personal salvation. It is a moving story about that one-on-one relationship in which Jesus restores the Gerasene to wholeness, creates a place for him in community, and responds to the violence of empire all at the same time. The exciting message of Jesus is that my own personal spirituality is inextricably intertwined with my ability to do justice in the world. There could be no better news for a church in the heart of empire. You and I, insofar as we are willing to risk a new way of being in relationship, insofar as we are willing to struggle to challenge the demon of empire, have a chance at that good news too. Nothing could be more liberating, nothing could be more fulfilling, than that.

A note from the author:

I am indebted to Ched Myers and his work in *Binding the Strong Man* and *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?*, Gloria and Ross Kinsler and their book *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*, Michael Hagler and his book *Is There No Other Way?*, Jean Paul Lederach and many of his writings including his essay "The Challenge of Terror."

New books trace the radical policies and practices of the Bush administration

Some use the forbidden L-word – “lies”

by Gene TeSelle

We've been warned often enough lately that pointing to the lies by our President and his administration is tantamount to treason. But Witherspoon Issues Analyst Gene TeSelle, undeterred by the threats of the Patriot Acts present and yet to come, offers a glimpse of five recent books that explore what they all view as the lies propagated and perpetuated by our current administration. To quote no less a patriot than Patrick Henry, “If this be treason, make the most of it.”

My interest was piqued when a fellow Presbyterian wrote, “Have you read Paul Krugman’s book? It’s like *A Moment to Decide*.”

That book, published in 2000, traced the conservative assault on the Presbyterian Church, originally with funding from J. Howard Pew and more recently with broad-based conservative support; the goal is to undo the Great Society and the New Deal, even the trust-busting achievements of Theodore Roosevelt, and take us back to a period of unregulated economic exploitation. A parallel study by Leon Howell, *United Methodism @ Risk: A Wake-Up Call*, was published earlier this year.

We wouldn’t want to claim that the religious press was the first to expose the tactics of the Right, including downright deception. But we may have pioneered the publication of outspoken books directed toward the general public.

In recent months at least five of them have been published, and it’s time to review them briefly. All of them, I notice, are still in hard cover, all priced at \$24.95 (in one case a bargain \$24), so you may want to check them out of your public library (and be sure the library gets

them).

Paul Krugman, author of *The Great Unraveling: Losing Our Way in the New Century* (xxix + 426 pp., Norton, \$25.95) has the most impeccable academic and journalistic credentials. After all, he’s a professor of economics at Princeton University and he writes a column twice a week for *The New York Times*. That doesn’t mean he pulls his punches (although the *Times* did forbid him to use the word “lies”). In his preface he quotes Helen Thomas’s judgment that George W. Bush is “the worst president in all of American history.” Krugman admits that Bush has “some stiff competition,” but adds that the consequences of “incompetence and malfeasance” have never been more serious.

The theme of Krugman’s book is the “sea change” that recently occurred in U.S. politics – the rise of a “radical right” that “now effectively controls the White House, Congress, much of the judiciary, and a good slice of the media.” He characterizes the radical right as a revolutionary group akin to the Jacobins of the French Revolution (he was probably too gentlemanly to mention Leninism as

another parallel). The similarity? A conviction that there are social and political institutions that “should not, in principle, exist.” Since the leaders of the movement do not accept the legitimacy of the current system, they feel no obligation to play by its rules. Neither do they accept the rights of others to criticize them; when they do, there is a “no-holds-barred counterattack.” “Yes, Virginia,” he concludes, “there is a vast right-wing conspiracy.”

Krugman asks that we “take the hard-line rightists now in power at their word” and not suppose, with many in the news media, that their goals are more limited than their rhetoric. Their behavior in office, Krugman says, indicates that their concern is not with free markets but with taking from the poor and giving it to the rich.

These are some of the generalizations that jump out of Krugman’s pages. There is lots of detail, since the book consists of reprints of his columns since 2000. They are grouped by theme — “Crony Capitalism,” “Fuzzy Math,” “California Screaming,” etc. – and they examine events as they occur, arguments as they are floated. If you want the detailed analyses, go read the book.

Very different in style and tone is Al Franken’s *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right* (xvii + 377 pp., Dutton, \$24.95). Franken, like Michael Moore, loves to enter the lion’s den and pull the animals’ tails. He’s encountered talk show hosts and conservative pundits in many different venues. He’s also done some put-ons, like looking into Bob Jones University with his college son, or writing on Harvard letterhead to John Ashcroft and other worthies, asking them to describe a moment when they were sexually tempted but overcame their urges through willpower and strength of character.

In a full-length book Franken has already tangled with Rush Limbaugh, that courageous and consistent champion of

One easy way to order any of these books: Go to the Witherspoon website, to www.witherspoonsociety.org/03-may/government_lies.htm There you can order any or all of these books – at a discount! – from Amazon.com. And Witherspoon will get a little percentage of the price of each book your order. So help yourself and help us all at the same time!



get-tough policies toward drug addicts. Here he takes on a number of right-wing pundits, including Ann Coulter and Bernie Goldberg, Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity, Wesley Pruden (editor of the Moonies' *Washington Times*) and Paul Gigot (chief of the editorial page for the *Wall Street Journal*). He also takes on Rupert Murdoch's Fox News Channel and Richard Mellon Scaife, the right-wing funder of many scurrilous attacks on the Clintons.

Franken is a master of what might be called "performance writing," not only keeping up a steady patter in the manner of a standup comic but supplying additional hints through tricks of typography. But that's not really the core of what he is doing. He goes into detail about the lies, misrepresentations, and downright fabrications of those who are now in power.

Franken pays such close attention to details that he is constantly deconstructing the smooth rhetoric of the spin doctors, showing that it is merely fancy painted scrim, and finding the facts behind their factoids. (To Presbyterians the book will be reminiscent of John R. Fry's occasional periodical in the 1970s, entitled *Now Is the Time for the Witherspoon Society to Scrutinize the Layman* [sic], in which he paid closer attention to its misrepresentations and half-truths than most people would care to give.) Franken often supplies his own statistical analyses to correct what the press usually just reproduces, and he sometimes goes on to create preposterous statistical fictions to show how easy it is.

Like Krugman, Franken outlines the "game plan" of the Bush administration: "Pretend to stay above the fray; use surrogates to lie, attack, and discredit; then get the media to report it." He also traces the relentless attack upon anyone who questions the Right's statements or actions. (A major instance, mentioned by several of these authors, is the way the administration tried to slime Dana Wilbanks after his October 2002 article in the *Washington Post* entitled "For Bush Facts Are Malleable: Presidential Tradition of Embroidering Key Asser-

tions Continues.") Franken is especially impatient with the news media and their attempt to be "balanced." "Imagine a political game of seesaw," he says, "with two people sitting on one end, and two others sitting in the middle."

If Krugman writes in the most analytical manner and Franken in the most frenetic, something of a balance is struck by Joe Conason in *Big Lies: The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How It Distorts the Truth* (245 pp., St. Martin's Press, \$24.95). It has an index, something that would be nearly impossible in Franken's acrobatic book. Having already written a book on the multi-year campaign to smear the Clintons, Conason traces ten important themes around which the Right has managed to create an "alternative reality" and convince, or at least hoodwink, too many people. They have claimed, for example, that the people have more in common with the Republicans than with "limousine liberals"; that conservatives (even the "chicken hawks") are patriotic while liberals are draft dodgers; that conservatives champion morality and family values while liberals indulge in immorality; that Republicans are fiscally responsible while Democrats are "tax and spend" liberals.

Like Krugman and Franken, Conason sees the dangers of the right-wing movement, calling them "sinister social termites gnawing away at the foundations of human civilization."

He unmasks the hidden lives of conservative champions of family values, including Helen Chenoweth of Idaho and Newt Gingrich of Alabama and lots of others.

He goes into detail about Trent Lott's declaration that if Strom Thurmond had won "we wouldn't have a lot of these problems we've been having ever since," overlooked by the media until messages began burning up the Internet. It was not just a misstatement; Lott for many years promoted the Council of Conservative Citizens, successor to the White Citizens Councils that functioned as "the respectable, white-collar

counterpart of the Ku Klux Klan."

He analyzes the administration's penchant for "crony capitalism," described by Lars-Erik Nelson as abuse of "the government's coercive powers of taxation and legislation to funnel public wealth to the private sector."

He shows deception at work. When the Enron scandal broke in early 2002, George W. Bush pretended he knew Kenneth ("Kenny Boy") Lay only as "a supporter of Ann Richards in my run in 1994." In fact Richards got \$12,500 from Lay and Enron, while Bush got \$146,500.

He tells the full story of "compassionate conservatism," the rhetoric by which "Bush has pasted a smiley face over the alienating scowl worn by Republicans during the Clinton years." The actual character of Bush's program was discovered too late by John DiIulio, who was disillusioned after eight months running the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives; he saw very little compassion and a lot of cynical patronage directed toward inner-city churches.

Conason thinks that liberals have to learn to "hit back hard." One correction has been offered by James McWilliams in a review in the *Texas Observer* (September 26, 2003): if you hit back, it means you were hit first; but people are more lastingly influenced by their first impressions, so the best defense is an early offense.

David Corn's *The Lies of George W. Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception* (ix + 337 pp., Crown, \$24) is much like Conason's, but it offers more connected and detailed narratives of fourteen issues – his supposed candor about his past; his campaign (remember this?) as "a uniter, not a divider"; his misrepresentations of two tax cuts for the wealthy; his assaults on air quality and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; the false information issued during the debate over stem cell research; his links with the Harken and Enron corporations; and the use of September 11 to justify world-class adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq that turned out to be ineffective

and counter-productive.

Corn not only exhibits the contradictions between Bush's emphasis on "personal responsibility" and his actual statements. He also engages in some philosophical inquiry, aided by Sisela Bok's book *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*. Acknowledging that most presidents lie, often "brazenly and with impunity," he judges them severely and goes on to argue that, in a democracy, office-holders have a responsibility not only to believe that what they are saying is true, but make every effort to know that it is true. Otherwise politics becomes what George Orwell said it was, "a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia," and "political speech" becomes "largely the defense of the indefensible."

In his conclusion, Corn tries his hand at explanation. He notes that reporters during the 2000 campaign disliked Gore's sanctimoniousness and blew every exaggeration out of proportion, while they thought that Bush was just "not so bright" and cut him lots of slack. In the debates, furthermore, they were surprised that Bush came off better than expected. "Presentation counted far more than accuracy." The same approach, of course, is found in Bush's repeated use of backdrops with slogans like "No Child Left Behind," stolen from the Children's Defense Fund.

Finally, there is a new book by Molly Ivins and Lou DuBose, *Bush-whacked: Life in George Bush's America* (xvi + 347 pp., Random House, \$ 24.95). This doesn't have the fast pace of Franken's book; it's done with a more leisurely and ironic Texas drawl. And it doesn't even worry about the word "lying." Mollie Ivins is accustomed to the Texas legislature, where with a few exceptions politics is just what Orwell suspected, "a mass of lies" and all the rest.

The theme is that "for us it's déjà vue all over again. We spent six years watching the man as governor of Texas." The only good news she has to offer is that

Dubya (or GeeDubya) has not been able to export the entire "Texas miracle." A chapter on the Harken case leads to the conclusion that "George W. Bush should declare himself a conscientious objector in his own war on corporate crime."

There are at least three interwoven narratives: GeeDubya's exploits in Texas, his years in the White House, and the effects that his policies have had on real people – women in factories gutting catfish or chickens, with no chance for a restroom break; people on the receiving end of the lax regulation of polluting industries; people with Listeria because of the Agriculture Department's policies; Wyoming ranchers victimized by drilling for natural gas in the Powder River Basin; people living in cold houses because of a broken promise about funding the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

After all of this, Ivins and DuBose have two basic solutions: end our "cash and carry political system" with campaign finance reform, and replace the way Congressional districts are drawn in most states (whose result is that very few races are seriously contested by the parties) with Iowa's, having them drawn by a nonpartisan commission that shapes "compact and contiguous" districts.

Well, that's got to be more than enough by way of review. Now go and read one or more of them!

Dear God . . .

Are these really kids' "letters to God"? We don't know. We don't really care. They're pretty funny. You'll find more of these, plus other stuff "just for fun," at www.witherspoonsociety.org/for_fun.htm

Dear God,

Please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter. There is nothing good in there now.

Amanda

Dear God,

Thank you for the baby brother, but what I asked for was a puppy. I never asked for anything before; you can look it up.

Joyce

Dear God,

If we come back as somebody else, please don't let me be Jennifer Horton - because I hate her.

Denise

God,

I read the bible. What does begat mean? Nobody will tell me.

Love, Alison

Dear God,

How did you know you were God? Who told you?

Charlene

Dear God,

I bet it's very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.

Nan

Thanks to Bill Knox

Where Two or More Are Gathered

Reflections on a conversation in Chicago, from Witherspoon president Kent Winters-Hazelton

A recent article in *The Layman OnLine* spoke of a meeting held in Chicago, hosted by Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick and General Assembly Council Executive Director John Detterick, for the leadership of groups representing the conservative/renewal and progressive/ecumenical groups within the church. As one of the invited participants, I want to share with Witherspoon's membership my impression of the event.

You can read the Layman article at: www.layman.org/layman/news/2003-news-articles/participant-in-private-meeting.htm

Those who were part of the 48-hour event – representing the Presbyterian Coalition, Presbyterians for Renewal, the Covenant Network, More Light Presbyterians, and the Witherspoon Society – were in accord that we had not gathered to make any agreements, deals or concessions. We were there for conversation, to get to know each other and perhaps understand one another better. And therein lies the great value of such an opportunity.

We shared several conversations around the magnificent themes of Ephesians 4:1-16:

- “With all humility and gentleness . . . making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit”;
- “There is one Lord, one faith one baptism, one God and Creator of all”;
- “equipping the saints . . . building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of faith . . . to maturity . . . not tossed by every wind of doctrine”;
- “speaking the truth in love . . .”

We did not come to engage in systematic Bible study; rather, we pursued a form of *lectio divina*, a sharing of what the text “says” to us as a group of church

leaders gathered in a retreat. We focused on two points emerging from the text: how we as 12 people together respond to the author's words in our interrelationships, and how this text might speak to our larger church and its tensions. Since we were not asked to prepare for the meeting by studying the text beforehand, it was clearly not intended to be a rigorous study to find common meaning in the text. But in sharing, we did discover new and inviting meaning in the text, and our discussion was meaningful, personal, insightful and helpful in understanding one another.

I experienced two significant epiphanies during the retreat. There was great hurt expressed by some of the evangelicals as a result of actions taken or rhetoric raised at General Assembly. I was genuinely surprised to hear some of the stories of events I had witnessed and celebrated, as they were told from a very different perspective. What I saw as wonderful examples of God's Spirit at work, others saw as the wounding of their spirit. As I talked with these friends I gained a deeper appreciation and understanding of the theological and social diversity that exists within our church. I can hope that these conservative friends heard the stories of our pain and saw things in a new light as well.

The second learning was the common affirmation of the church in mission. While mission is a very broad term encompassing a wide variety of opportunities, we did see some great possibilities for the church's engagement in mission. There was an exciting note of hope in our conversation with the realization that if we could focus together on our outreach, be it evangelism or the establishment of just economics and peace, it might help us lift our eyes beyond the issue (or issues) that threaten to divide us.

And all this came from talking. The *Lay-*

man quoted one participant as saying, “I don't think talk is going to solve our problem and this is all talk.” Respectfully, I would disagree: Talk may be the most valuable asset we have in these difficult times. The more opportunities we have to talk together, the more hope we have that we might be able to move forward, together, in God's time and by God's lead.

Thank you, Clif and John — with a special appreciation for the work of Sharon Youngs for her able support and assistance — for this opportunity and for the invitation to the Witherspoon Society to participate.

An evangelical participant comments

We've just received this note responding to Kent's reflection on the Chicago meeting. Its author, the Rev. Jin S. Kim, is president-elect of Presbyterians for Renewal, and also participated in the Chicago conversation.

Kent and I had clear policy disagreements in Chicago, but I agree with his assessment of the retreat more than the account I read in the *Layman*. In the area of dissent and defiance of the constitution, Kent and I had the sharpest disagreement. In the area of focusing on being a church for the world, where we celebrate the gifts and perspectives that both sides bring in the work of sharing the good news of Jesus, we made great progress.

Everyone agreed that for Christians, honoring the rules of engagement is just as important as “winning.” Above all, we saw each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, destined to be in fellowship for eternity, so why aren't we talking more now, as a demonstration, of Christ's reconciliation in our lives?

I wonder sometimes if we are not all Pharisees and Sadducees arguing about which side is right while Jesus is pointing to something entirely different.

Jin

Can we talk?? Well, Yes.

Conversations between Covenant Network and Evangelical Pastors and church professionals

a special report from the Rev. Jean Rodenbough, of Madison, North Carolina

Biblical authority and interpretation was the focus of a recent conversation between Covenant Network members in Salem Presbytery (NC) and pastors identifying themselves as Evangelical Pastors (some of whom lead Confessing Churches). Gathering at the presbytery office and moderated by the Rev. Ike Kennerley, General Presbyter, about 30 pastors and educators participated.

Presenting for the Covenant Network was Dr. Al Winn, former Moderator of the General Assembly, PCUS, past president of Louisville Seminary, and currently serving on the Covenant Network board. The other presenter was the Rev. Walter Taylor, pastor of Forest Park Presbyterian Church in Statesville, NC.

Referring to the Scots Confession of 1567 and the Westminster Confession, Taylor began the dialogue, noting that God's word as perceived in that time has come to be regarded quite differently in our own day. He pointed out the contrasts in liberal and conservative views of scriptural interpretation and authority, charging that the liberal understanding recognizes the bible not as canon but rather in the "classic" sense, defining "classic" as the claim that there were no distinct lines between the bible and early Christian literature in terms of authority. He stated that conservatives have problems with the historical critical method of interpretation, on the grounds that it denies the unity of the text by holding up community background and personal experience as integral to understanding scripture, and will lead to the "unraveling of the church" by placing the reader above the text. In defining a dichotomy of truth into propositional and personal, liberals come up with a false, ultimately meaningless faith, he pointed out. The differences between conservatives and

liberals, he observed, are more than simply how one interprets scripture; they go to the very nature of theology, church, and Christianity itself.

Al Winn, however, did not find such differences in the way liberals (read "progressives") or conservatives and evangelicals understand scripture as necessarily irreconcilable. Citing the Covenant Network's position on biblical authority as lifting up scripture to be the one true reliable witness of God's word through Jesus Christ, he referred to the Chalcedon creed that claims Christ to be fully human and fully divine. Scripture reflects that human and divine nature as well, he affirmed.

Winn emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit as being central in understanding scripture, moving away from the doctrinal arguments of the evangelicals and conservatives to allow for God's freedom in guiding us to new readings of the canon itself. Describing the Spirit's inspiration of human writers who are limited by their time in history and social, cultural settings, he stated that God makes our words the work of God however God determines to do so. Going further, Winn reminded us that not the Holy Spirit not only inspires writers of scripture but inspires also the hearers and readers of the word, so that we are guided in our understanding. This is the "double work" of the Holy Spirit: both proclaimer and hearer are necessary.

Winn went on to say that the authority of scripture, however, is under the supreme authority of Jesus Christ, through his life and teachings. That is, the only way to discern the authority of scripture in our lives is to see the Word lived out in the flesh by the One who shows us God through himself. Thus, he noted, to test the spirits we must be led by the

Holy Spirit, who always points us to Christ. We must also always be willing to be aware that we could be wrong in our understanding of the biblical word. He reminded us that scripture may be the "only infallible rule of faith and practice," but we are fallible readers.

In assessing the presentations, it would seem that Al Winn comes to scripture with humility, waiting for the Spirit's guidance and remaining open to new interpretations within the teachings of our confessions and within the canon itself. Walter Taylor clearly stated an alternate understanding, but one that brooked little possibility of opening up to different perspectives. Quite scholarly, his presentation kept on focus to support his view, while Al Winn's allowed for the complexity in biblical interpretations, and for dilemmas Christians encounter in trying to apply biblical teachings to our own day. His approach also affirmed biblical authority as penultimate to the authority of Jesus Christ. Taylor made little reference to current problems in biblical interpretation and did not bring Jesus Christ into his presentation.

The questions and discussions following these two presentations were open, civil, and direct, posing concerns from both camps, of progressives and evangelicals (although the statement was made that in truth we are all evangelicals and there is no need to appropriate that term for one perspective alone). After discussing scripture in relation to current concerns about homosexuality, arguing "from creation" as well as from the historical setting, we did come to some sort of agreement in general terms despite claims that scripture is "unambiguous" on that particular issue. There was general consent that the bible is the word of God, or perhaps the word of God as written, to which we come "discerning the Spirit with humility." Some qualifications were appended, such as our need to reduce the risk of discerning the spirits in ways that can possibly be dangerous by understanding scripture through scripture, a solid Reformed method of interpretation.



The morning's conversation was not intended to convince or to win debates, but rather to provide an opportunity for those there who came with strong claims on scripture and its interpretation to hear those who held different understandings. As we adjourned, we all expressed interest in continuing the conversation and at some point carrying the discussion to a presbytery meeting in some manner. The two major groups in our presbytery, as represented at the morning's conversation, need more time together, however. We have begun a journey since last summer, when we invited those from the Confessing Church to join us for lunch at one of our meetings. That was followed by some conversations over lunch by Walter Taylor and our Covenant Network co-moderator, the Rev. Stewart Ellis, pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem and Al Winn's son-in-law. We have come a fair distance from hostile debates on the floor of presbytery and the hope is that even though we may not change our viewpoints, we can see our opponents as ones God has also called to care for this troubled church.

“Families in Transition” panel works for concord

by Eric Mount

Both the organizers and the participants made efforts to build bridges at the meeting of a panel gathered by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to consider the General Assembly's referral of *Living Faithfully with Families in Transition* together with an alternative statement that became the majority report of the National Issues Committee. Meeting at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary on September 23 and 24, the panel had a composition that was aimed at building communication between the competing groups at the Assembly, and the irenic spirit that characterized the deliberations evidenced a matching intent. Although no seamless consensus emerged, there were encouraging gestures of conciliation; and there were positive steps toward the further development of a report that could have greater promise of broad acceptance in the church.

Those around the table were Barbara Gaddis, a family therapist and the chair of the task force that produced the *Families in Transition* report; Gloria Albrecht (clergy, religion professor at University of Detroit Mercy) and Sue Dickson (El Paso pastor), who were on the editing committee for *Families in Transition*; Eric Mount (clergy, recently retired religion professor at Centre College) and Marjorie Working (clergy, adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary), who were the presenters of the minority and majority reports respectively at the General Assembly and were leaders of morning and evening prayers at this meeting; William “Beau” Weston (elder, sociology professor at Centre College), who had been a member of first Task Force on Changing Families; Scott Williamson, professor at Louisville Seminary, who enthusiastically told the group of his impending marriage; to the group; Alan Wisdom (research analyst for the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington), who was the primary author of the substitute report

that became the majority report; Belinda Curry, ACSWP associate; Nile Harper, ACSWP chair; Peter Sulyok, ACSWP coordinator, and Belinda Curry, ACSWP associate. Of this group, Albrecht, Dickson, Harper, and Wiley were to be designated as the writing team for the next stage. Working suggested, along with some of those who sent written comments to the panel, that Wisdom be added to the team; and Harper, acting as chair, immediately accepted the suggestion, invited Wisdom to join the team, and received his acceptance. One can always second-guess representation on such panels and writing teams, but there are evidences in these lists of conciliatory effort.

Assembly action had directed that the further consideration of the original report and the substitute that became the majority report be done in consultation with Office of Theology and Worship, and the first order of business was to respond to the theological draft that had been prepared by Joseph Small, associate director of the OTW, and Charles Wiley, associate for theology of OTW, and two members of the Princeton Theological Seminary faculty — theologian Ellen Charry and Bible scholar Chip Dobbs-Allsopp.

That discussion was preceded and followed, however, by worship together, and it was also preceded by a rather extended sharing of family experiences by everyone around the table.

The discussion of the theological document, which was presented by Charles Wiley, was very promising. The reception was quite positive, but far from passive. There was broad support and encouragement, but there were also suggestions for elaboration (for instance on adoption), addition, and even subtraction. They were offered in good spirit and received appreciatively, never defensively. The draft was seen as being

on the right track, and Eric Mount was commissioned to work with Wiley to preserve whatever elements of the original “theological foundations” section should be recommended for a place in the new version.

The second major block of time was devoted to hearing from observers. The panel had received written testimony from about forty people, and there were four people on hand on Wednesday morning to address the panel. They were not made to adhere to a strict time limit, and they were engaged in dialogue by members of the panel so that their contributions received clarification and elaboration. Jean Snyder, a former health educator and guidance counselor, had left a marriage to an abusive, alcoholic husband and raised her family as a single parent. She did not experience acceptance and support from the church during those years. She had sat through the proceedings at the Assembly in frustration and supported the original report. Tim Jessen, a pastor from Mitchell, Indiana, spoke on behalf of his son, a YAD at the General Assembly, and himself in wishing for more emphasis on marriage between a man and woman and on the role of the traditional family. He bemoaned the evidences of declining morality in our society, citing a governor and a seminary president as examples. Landon Whitsitt, who had been a TSAD at the Assembly and had supported the original report in the National Issues Committee, spoke of the experiences of his wife and himself as children of divorce and urged that the new version of the report tell the church what the seven characteristics are that make a family effective. Megan Acedo, a college student and a YAD who supported the substitute motion in the National Issues Committee, spoke of the benefits of a two-parent family as a daughter from a single parent family. She wanted the theology section strengthened and wanted a corrective to our “anything goes” society.

When the panel turned to its own discussion of the reports and directions for the future, there were both efforts to find common ground and efforts to pin point where the bottom line differences were. When the discussion seemed to pit

“bringing families into line” with a Christian norm against “reaching out” to all kinds of families, the question arose about the original mandate of the task force. Gaddis, for example, wanted the group to remember that the charge was not to come up with a sex ethic and a listing of proscribed behaviors but to address the challenge of ministry to the several kinds of families that we are seeing and experiencing. There were also questions raised about how data are interpreted, and suggestions were made by Weston for example about the interpretation in the “Divorce and Children” section and also about looking beyond the percentages of a specific moment in time in determining the married component of the population. Special appreciation was broadly expressed for the “Cultural Values” portion of the original report that highlights materialism, individualism, and consumerism as family foes. Wisdom was asked about how he would pair his advocacy work with his membership on the writing team, and he explained how he would try to fulfill both responsibilities without violating the trust of his fellow members of the team.

An important moment in the discussion came when Alan Wisdom, after being invited to join the writing team, wondered about the “bottom line” concerns on each side and expressed the hope that they could both be addressed. He heard one side saying that multiple family forms should be recognized and that all families should be welcomed. He wanted the group to understand that he had not intended to put down non-traditional families in the substitute report that he had prepared. He agreed that “our intention is to help all families.” On the other side, he cited a “desire to affirm scriptural teachings on marriage and parenthood and a desire not to convey moral approval of sexual relationships outside marriage.” He thought that it might be possible to find a way to address both sets of concerns.

Eric Mount, in turn, agreed that locating “bottom line” concerns on both sides was a useful way to consider the task ahead. However, he had a different take on the bottom lines. On the one side, he cited a concern that the effort to be

supportive of marriage, which is important, not be construed as support of any marriage. He cited the town in Kentucky where only the Presbyterian Church was a partner in the local spouse abuse shelter. Most of the pastors in town were inclined to try and get the abused spouses to go back to their partners. The church has been complicit in endorsing marriage per se without insisting that all covenants are not equally healthy. From the other side, he heard a belief that this report is another site for the conflict over whether unions between people of the same sex are ever to be approved by the church or must simply be regarded as manifestations of sexual anarchy in our society. On that latter issue, he wondered if there is a way to find common ground, even though the *Families in Transition* report had avoided making such unions a prominent topic.

The panel will gather again in December, and the group said its good-byes with appreciation for the quality of the discussion and good hopes for the next stage.

The author:

Eric Mount is a Presbyterian minister and recently retired religion professor at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. He was a member of the General Assembly committee that dealt with the “Families in Transition” report, and advocated for the committee’s minority report, which supported the original study document.

Theological musings

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

Why We Shouldn't Wait

We (the PCUSA) shouldn't wait to ordain called and qualified gays and lesbians to all offices of the church, and to endorse same sex unions and / or gay marriages between persons committed to a loving relationship of mutual help and care. Here's an outline of the reasons why.

First, a strong (and to many minds convincing) argument can be made that draws on a variety of sources and has considerable biblical support. The argument centers on the typically Protestant and biblically well attested conviction that we belong to the God of grace and that, therefore, we have little reason to exclude either ourselves or anyone else from the scope of redemption. But it also includes at least the following additional elements.

- a. Jesus Christ discloses the God of grace, and a church that acknowledges a gracious God will endeavor to be capacious rather than exclusionary. It will understand itself primarily as a collection of wayward but graced sinners, a community of beneficiaries who, in response to the disarming and assuring knowledge that God is gracious, try to make as faithful and therefore as inclusive a witness as they can. Indeed, such a church will also suspect that exclusive communities often reflect the sorts of constricted and defensive preferences, loyalties, tendencies and commitments that characterize human corruption.
- b. Biblically supported understandings of equity indicate that it is unjust to treat people unfairly. But this is precisely what the church does when it excludes from ordained leadership a particular class of called and qualified members. Especially in a church where all other members may be considered for positions of ordained leadership, the exclusion of gays and lesbians makes for (at best) a second class or halfway membership.
- c. Marriage and family should be understood, first and foremost, as covenantal relationships and communities of love, responsibility, and care. These intimate and companionate partnerships entail mutual duties and responsibilities, among them fidelity, respect, and the willingness to welcome and to care for children should a couple be so blessed. But whether or not a couple is able to have children is not and has never been the determinative criterion. There have always been some married partners who do not have children, and there have always been some partnerships that result in children but nevertheless fail as genuinely mutual, loving, and responsible covenants. Of course, to affirm covenantal relationships of mutual love,

responsibility, and care is not to endorse every imaginable gay and lesbian relationship, any more than it is to endorse every imaginable heterosexual relationship. (Those who disapprove of this "companionate" view, might direct their complaints at Puritans, such as William Perkins and Richard Baxter, who did much to develop the idea and to revise earlier, medieval conceptions that sometimes centered more directly on procreation.)

- d. Embodied sexuality is a feature of God's good creation, although this does not mean that all sexual activity is appropriate. The question of what is natural takes on a measure of importance in this regard because we believe that God is creator and governor. However, a variety of evidence may count for making a judgment about what constitutes natural sexual behavior. Among the resources to which one may appeal are studies of the sexual behaviors of human societies and populations, as well as comparative studies of the behaviors of other animal species. One may also appeal to philosophical and literary perspectives. In any case, it is not immediately apparent (as is sometimes rather rashly and Aristotelianly assumed) that what renders a sexual act natural is simply the possibility that it may result in offspring. Indeed, were this the sole criterion, one would have to conclude that a good deal of married heterosexual sex, especially among somewhat older couples, is unnatural. Neither is it immediately apparent that there is only one function of the sexual organs. One might rather conclude that sexual activity among humans has a variety of purposes and / or functions, including procreation but also companionship, gratification, and play. Again, we sometimes are less likely to regard sexual orientations as "unnatural" if we believe that they flow from biological and psychological forces that individuals cannot easily alter at will. Without trying here to sort through the (somewhat ambiguous) evidences having to do with hormonal configurations, we may at least observe this: The fundamental experience of most persons most of the time, is that their sexual orientations befall them. One's sexuality (as seemed apparent to me as well as to many of my adolescent friends in northern New Jersey circa 1966) is not primarily the product of rational deliberation. To a significant extent and degree, it seems a rather nonnegotiable dimension of who one is.

This is a good place to register a second major point. Some passages in the Bible refer to homosexual practices and behavior. All are negative, and they cannot summarily be dismissed. However, in the judgment of many scholars, at least some of these passages do not refer to the homosexual practices we have in mind here, i.e., committed relationships between consenting adults. Some associate homosexual relations rather closely with the prohibited religious practices of other peoples, e.g., Leviticus 18:22, 20:13. When it comes to the story of Sodom in Genesis 19, consider whether the behavior of the men of the city would have been significantly improved had they demanded that Lot hand over two *female* visitors. Perhaps the real sin of Sodom was violence and inhospitality.

Even so, there is Romans 1, where Paul implies a different understanding of what is natural than the one I have suggested. According to Joseph Fitzmyer, the Apostle assumes that there is essentially one natural function of the sexual organs themselves, namely the expression of love between a man and a woman for the procreation of children. Paul regards homosexual conduct as a “misuse of the natural procreative faculty” that is associated with idolatry and, while he may not have in mind precisely the same practices that we do, his remarks are unequivocal.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons, the due penalty for their error. (*Rom. 1:26-27*).

How do we deal with this?

In the final analysis, I think, we can only appeal to theological themes and ideas that command broad biblical support (e.g., the conviction that the God of Jesus Christ is the God of grace) as elements of an overall argument to endorse practices that at least one biblical passage opposes. It seems important to point out, however, that somewhat similar arguments have been tried before. Consider John Calvin’s reasons in favor of lending money at (limited rates of) interest despite his recognition of specific biblical prohibitions. Consider, too, that many biblical passages imply possible religious sanctions for “total war,” ethnic cleansing, and genocide, e.g., Joshua, while more than a few theologians and churches have chosen instead to devise biblically supported arguments in favor of “just” limitations in the conduct of war.

Third, to understand ordination as we Presbyterians do, and then deny it to a class of persons – perhaps on the specious grounds that the great God of glory and grace “cannot” call them – is to exclude, reject, and hurt persons of good faith and commitment. Over the years, I have witnessed the church’s rejection of the considerable gifts and contributions of gay and lesbian seminarians, professors, ministers, teachers, elders, and deacons. The cost in lost talents to the church has been significant, but the costs to those persons whose gifts and contributions have been spurned has been cruelly and extraordinarily high. (Quite rightly, I think, the rejection is received, in effect, as an invitation to leave.) Now, it may be that a theological argument can be constructed for keeping in place policies and procedures that make for this measure of suffering and hurt. But, as these practices appear not to accord with the rule of love, the arguments that sustain them would have to be exceptionally strong indeed. If there is any doubt (in this instance anyway) it would seem better to err on the side of love.

Again, to refuse to endorse same sex relationships is to refuse them the measure of social acceptance and recognition that

heterosexual relationships enjoy. Such acceptance and recognition helps to strengthen and support relationships of fidelity and mutual responsibility. (Think, for example, what it can mean for a man or a woman to be joined in matrimony before a community of family and friends.) To withhold it is (in effect and un-Christianly) to discourage (or at least fail to support) impulses toward fidelity, responsibility, and mutual care among a significant portion of the population.

Finally, some Presbyterians who largely agree with the points I have made here nevertheless refrain from pressing the issue for fear that the church may split. (For a tense circumstance that may be cited by people on all sides, see the current strife among Episcopalians over the consecration of Bishop Robinson.) As I have already indicated above, the current stance of the Presbyterian Church (USA) can only be maintained at a very high, continuing, painful, and cruel cost to a particular group of persons. At such a cost, it is at least theologically questionable to uphold the visible unity of a particular denomination. Yes, the unity of the church is a considerable value. It points to one Lord and one baptism. Moreover, when people and groups join together in Christ despite important differences and even conflicts, they testify to the possibility of a loyalty and a witness that cross barriers and boundaries in order to make for reconciliation, new community, and more abundant life. As a professor in a Presbyterian seminary, I am also keenly aware that any significant split or diminishment would pose considerable practical and financial risks to many of this denomination’s most important institutions and involvements. Even so, no Protestant can value the visible unity of the church above all else. To do so, of course, would be to turn one’s back on the principle of the Reformation itself, and also to turn the church into an idol. The fundamental question is whether the church truly witnesses to the gospel of grace.

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 douging2@aol.com

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

“A Biblical Vision for the Future”

2003 Ghost Ranch seminar offered a challenging Biblical vision for the future

Jane Hanna reports

The evaluations from the 2003 participants in the seminar at Ghost Ranch, “A Biblical Vision for the Future” – sponsored by Witherspoon, the Peace Fellowship, and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation – indicate it was exceptionally well received. The leaders, Jennifer Butler, Joseph Gerson, and Carol F. Johnston, were informative and challenging.

Carol Johnston, Assistant Professor of Theology and Culture at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, shared biblical foundations for discussions about economic and environmental issues. She began by noting that creation is part of the covenant throughout scripture. Our environment is out of balance because we don’t look at the whole picture or trust what God says in covenants meant to establish right relations with God and all creation. Pointing to the Sabbath and Jubilee chapters in Leviticus and Numbers, Johnston indicated the frequent references to God’s instructions for building community that is good for all people, land, plants and creatures.

Johnston presented an excellent summary of economic theories and the shortcomings as well as the positive aspects of each – what has worked and has not for the good of all. Often our values and assumptions about humanity determine the economic theory we choose, and most economic theories, she said, discount their effects on humanity and the environment. She shared examples of churches helping people understand what the economy is doing in our culture, our overwhelming anxieties about security and how that can be overcome when people are there for each other.

Joseph Gerson, Director of Regional Programs for the American Friends Ser-

vice Committee, New England Regional Office, supplied a helpful summary of the difference between Western attitudes about dominating nature and Muslim habits of praying five times a day, understanding God’s intent for simple living and sharing resources.

He also summarized the history of Christian attitudes toward Islamic cultures and the antagonisms that fuel US foreign policy decisions.

Gerson, who yearly visits Japan, dealt in depth with the consequences of nuclear weapons, including those used against Japanese cities, as well as plans for escalating the magnitude of the US nuclear arsenal and positioning it in space. He also pointed to the intentions of US leaders who believe it necessary for the US to retain its military and economic dominance in the world, describing how this national security strategy is being implemented. On the more hopeful side, Gerson summarized the strength of peace activities around the world, noting those we can join in our own communities to become part of a growing international movement.

Jennifer Butler, who directs advocacy and education programs for the Presbyterian United Nations Office and is the Presbyterian representative to the United Church Center at the UN, provided an encouraging message about the strength of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in world affairs. She described them as transnational, international movements that help balance the power of the US. As the severe unilateralism of the US negates the dream that the United Nations could help prevent war and seek political and social justice, the NGOs help keep those aspirations



Back row, L to R: Carol Johnston, Joseph Gerson, Jennifer Butler. Front row: Lois Baker, Jane Hanna

alive.

Butler shared her concern about the increasing influence of New Right think tanks, set up to work globally to shut down the United Nations and particularly to stop progress around reproductive rights, women’s and children’s rights. She claimed the media are distracting us from the truth, that people are struggling with the empire and domination goals of the US and that religious leaders are needed to help us resist this. A very helpful exercise Butler provided was a comparison of the New World order as envisioned by the US with that of our Book of Confessions. Seeing side-by-side the goals of the US National Security Strategy, the UN Development Program and the Presbyterian Book of Confessions was most revealing. Another paper positioned the myths of empire against the alternative message of Jesus. These are useful tools we can use with groups in our congregations to assist in awareness of how far from biblical roots our political and economic policies have moved our nation.

It was an outstanding week, participants wrote, with messages important to hear, assimilate and share in our associations back home.



Good reading from the Ghost Ranch seminar:

After the seminar, Jane Hanna suggested a few books that she has found helpful in dealing with the issues considered during the seminar:

- *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* by Michael T. Klare (this was on the list Joseph Gerson gave us last summer)
- *Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World is Possible*, a Report of The International Forum on Globalization, co-chaired by John Cavanagh & Jerry Mander
- *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* by Chris Hedges

I was able to get each of these on Amazon.com

You can order these books from Amazon.com through the Witherspoon website, and thus earn a little bit of extra support for your favorite progressive troublemakers.

Announcing for next year ...

Ghost Ranch Seminar — July 26-August 2, 2004

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 the 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

A review:

Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love

Edited by Marvin M. Ellison and Sylvia Thorson-Smith

Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003

by Doug King

Not so very long ago a thoughtful, provocative report was drafted to give guidance to the Presbyterian Church on a wide range of questions dealing with sexuality. It was sent to the 1991 General Assembly, where a few groups on the right wing of the church focused the debate on questions of homosexuality, and created enough alarm that the report was rejected.

The report, though, contained a great deal of careful thinking and analysis of our society's attitudes and behaviors relating to sexuality, and offered helpful surveys of ten specific issues, along with useful policy recommendations. Happily, even without the Assembly's stamp of approval, the report has been published and widely used ever since. Now some twenty writers have been invited to look again at the report, which is in the booklet *Presbyterians and Human Sexuality 1991*, published by the Office of the General Assembly. Their survey of the many issues in the report, in the light of growing knowledge and continuing debates on questions of sexuality, offers new insight and calls us back to the good work of the original report.

There is a wealth of material in this collection, far beyond the scope of this short review. But two general themes stand out for me.

First, **our sexual relations are intimately bound up with our many ways of seeking and using power.** Sylvia Thorson-Smith captures this idea well in her essay on moving toward "sexual health and well-being," when she writes,

Never content to categorize human diversity simply as "different," patriarchal society invests power, reward, status, merit, and value in some categories over others. In a complex matrix of both

personal and social relationships, our sexual lives are infused with virtually invisible and unexamined power dynamics. Furthermore, sexual health is narrowly defined according to the experiences and interests of dominant groups. (p. 239)

Many of the other essays shed light on this power dynamic: the relationships between straight and gay, between women and men, between "good" and "bad" (however that's defined), and much more. Daniel Maguire explores the many ways in which our male-dominated culture has led most of us to view sexuality as dangerous and bad, as a chaotic force which must above be subjected to control. And that control, of course, has been seen as the work of the men! Virginia Ramey Mollencott talks about how we view humans as either male or female (in the "binary gender paradigm," as she names it), so we define all those who don't fit the model as deviants needing to be fixed. So we exclude millions of people from any legitimate existence, condemning them to life in the shadows.

The other insight for me is that **our sexuality and sexual experiences, in all their variety, can be modes for revelation of the divine**, since they help us know ourselves and others in ways not possible otherwise, and give and receive love in extraordinary ways. So Robert Goss and Scott Haldeman, both writing as gay men, show how deeply their experience leads them into new dimensions of experiencing the divine, the sacred. And Toddie Peters in "Embracing God as Goddess" explores female sexuality as a way of thinking about the divine. So she suggests seeing "God/ess" through women's experience of bodily change, of nurturing, of feeling pain, of valuing

relationships more than control. This leads her to say that this understanding of the feminine side of God/ess can lead us to care more about the quality of relationships than about particular norms and limits, as the male-oriented concern for control tends to do.

There's much more in this collection. The co-editors, both of whom served on the original study committee, begin by setting out the project of the book, to extend the work of the Human Sexuality report. Yes, it was rejected, but the issues are still with us, and these essays remind us of the power of the basic approach to the subject that was taken in the study: an affirmation of sexuality and of divine grace. After so many years of hearing the same old arguments about homosexuality, it's refreshing to see sexuality in a much wider framework.

Beverly W. Harrison reminds us that the study placed issues of sexuality solidly within the framework of justice. That leads to the further reminder that we cannot change the various forms of sexual oppression without joining the wider struggle for justice, including economic justice in our own society, and in the new challenges of globalization. Other essays, on AIDS and on violence against women, underline the terrible consequences of globalization.

Johanna van Wijk-Bos offers a very helpful look at "how to read what we read" in the Bible, showing how Biblical teachings on sexuality reflect changing economic and social situations in Israel and in the early church. So, for instance, she says that in early Israel, as an agricultural society, women and men were largely equal, as co-workers in their farms and households. As the nation became more urbanized, the role of women was more restricted; after the Exile, as the nation of Israel struggled to recover, women became valued primarily for producing offspring and maintaining the family within an increasingly patriarchal system. Finally she concludes that justice is the "hermeneutical key" through which we can relate the Biblical world to our own. This justice demands love for the other – even (or especially) when the

“other” is in some way a stranger. And it calls us into covenantal relationships (faithful and sexual) with others.

There’s more. These essays will lead you into fresh perspectives on issues we deal with far too often – or maybe not enough: domestic violence, clergy sexual misconduct, sexuality and aging, environmental ethics, the ways our economic arrangements affect our sexual relationships, the troubles in our marriages.

You may or may not feel a need to be more interested in sex. But the contributors to this volume certainly make the subject interesting and ... well ... creative.

**Are you on our
Witherspoon
members’
e-list?**

**Check on page 21
to learn more.**

A new ACSWP video encourages congregations to become involved connecting diversity and seeking justice in their communities.

Connecting Diversity in Community: Race, Class, Gender, Religion

American society has never been more culturally diverse and rich, yet our communities are sadly fragmented. People with unique heritages and perspectives live side by side, but seldom interact with each other in any meaningful way. In many communities, our churches physically occupy the center of a town or neighborhood, but they are not necessarily central to the lives of the people who reside there. As Christians, many of us are painfully aware of these divisions but have reluctantly accepted them as inevitable. But are they?

In this video, you will see congregations and ministries who made a commitment to the challenging task of breaking down barriers and unhealthy divisions in their communities. In their own style, each of these groups focused their attention outward to the people and groups around them, contemplated prayerfully what they heard and saw, and used their faith to make meaningful connections.

By the time you and your group have completed the five sessions of the video, you will have covered a vast array of issues and topics, and explored your own congregation and community thoroughly! And, if you and your group accept the challenge, you will develop your own plan of action to connect diversity in community and begin to break down the barriers of race, class, gender and religion.

The video is available from Presbyterian Distribution Service for \$9.95, plus shipping. The VHS version is item #68-600-03-002; the DVD is item #68-600-03-001. Order by phone at (800) 524-2612 or by fax at (502) 569-8030, or go to <http://www.pcusa.org/acswp/connecting.htm> to place an order online.

DROUGHT

The soil that sustains now becomes but dust
finely and more finely worn,
abraded 'til it seems to disappear.
The dessication prompts the beetles
to convert pinons to stands of rust.
The life that once was mere desert
presents its face as desolation.
As the rains forsake the earth
a death it seems invades.

The writer knows the drought as well
even when the words are there
they fail to gel into the thoughts
from which they were derived.

Yet other droughts may be perceived
if look with unclouded eyes we may.
Droughts of conscience and of heart
that claim for ourselves superiority
even insight, as of deity,
to serve as judge and executioner
of those with whom we disagree.

To feel we may wield the sword
with total impunity because our power
exceeds that of others here
surely outweighs the sin of any other brand.

Yes, indeed, there are droughts
of many sorts
Not all of which are to be quenched
by draughts.

Frank O. Shuck
Mar. 11, 2003

Witherspoon News

Discerning and shaping Witherspoon's mission

One of the main tasks of the Witherspoon executive committee, as we met in Albuquerque in September, was to spend a full day in thinking about where we have come from over the past 30 years, and where we should be going in the future.

Out of that process of discernment we drafted a new statement of our mission. It's a work in process, for we have yet to name some specific actions and programs that will help us realize each of the specific mission areas listed in the statement (in bold type).

But that may take a while! And it will take more than the thinking of a few officers to flesh out our mission. So we invite you to consider the statement, and let us know what activities and programs you would see as carrying out some part of that mission.

We can't promise to do everything that's suggested, of course. But we'll certainly take very seriously whatever you suggest!

Just send your thoughts to your editor: Doug King, 1418 Clarendon Drive, Wayzata, MN 55391-2103. Phone (952) 473-2711. E-mail: dougking2@aol.com

So here's the statement. Please let us hear from you!

The Witherspoon Society Mission

Revised October 2003:

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, animated by our hope for the reign of God.

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.

Now – let us know what you see as ways to fulfill our mission!

From the Witherspoon nominating committee:

WE'RE LOOKING FOR SUGGESTIONS

Your Nominating Committee is seeking suggestions for nominations for the following positions on the Executive Committee:

President and one Member-at-Large.

Right now, it seems these are the only spots that will need to be filled at the time of the election in 2004. (Annual Meetings are traditionally held during General Assembly.)

Let someone on the Nominating Committee know about your good ideas - especially if you think the people you have in mind would be willing to serve! And don't be shy about suggesting your own name for consideration.

Nominating Committee members and their e-mails are: Lynne Reade, Chair (lynnereade@comcast.net); Jose Olagues (jose@pbygc.org); Don Smith (donlsmith@synod.org); Jake Young (liaison with Executive Committee) (jake@first-pres-church.org).

Thanks to Jill Acree

The Witherspoon executive committee accepted regretfully the resignation of Jill Acree as a member at large of the board. She is deeply involved in community activities in Ada, Oklahoma, and now is expecting the arrival of a new child in her family.

The
Next
Network
News

Our Witherspoon board meeting in October developed the new mission statement that you'll find on the preceding page. We hope you'll send your comments and suggestions, both about the statement itself and about ways we might implement it in the next few years. We'll share your thinking in our next issue.

We especially want to develop new programs and resources that will help congregations in developing new forms of mission for justice and peace, both in their own communities and the wider world.

Please give us your best thinking! Your responses will make up part of the next *Network News*, along with reports and analysis of issues that may be coming to the next General Assembly.

**Deadline for submissions
is
January 15, 2004**

Please let us hear from you!

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**Spread the
good word!**

Please share this
with a friend ...
or give a membership
as a Christmas gift.

Or encourage your
congregation to become a
"group member" of
Witherspoon, and get 10
copies of *Network News* to
spread around.

Or form a Witherspoon
group in your presbytery!

Or, hey, why not all of the
above!

Membership coordinator Jake
Young can help.

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

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- _____ **copies of this issue**
- _____ copies of the Summer 2003 issue, reporting on the 215th General Assembly
- _____ copies of the Winter 2003 issue, with reflections on the approaching invasion of Iraq, and the need for commitment to "the common good"
- _____ copies of the Spring, 2002 issue, with Doug Ottati on C-67 and the Book of Confessions
- _____ copies of the Winter, 2002 issue, with material from the Stony Point Conference on the Confession of 1967
- _____ copies of the special Fall '99 issue on **Working for Economic Justice**

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

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** _____

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(in case of questions)

Return this form to:
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