

let justice roll down

Witherspoon

Network News

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We
look
toward
a new
Global Engagement Initiative



The Co-Moderators' Column

Musings from Ghost Ranch – on spirits old and new

by Trina Zelle, Co-Moderator of the Witherspoon Society board

Attending a conference at Ghost Ranch on Halloween is a novel experience. A young kitchen staff person wearing wings cleaned up after breakfast this morning and a visiting librarian showed up at lunch with a gigantic (and fake) spider on her head.

And, having sat through orientation for the first time in several visits here, I have recently absorbed the many supernatural legends attached to this place, which were evidently promulgated for the most venal of reasons – the desire to keep nosy people away from a profitable cattle rustling business.

But beyond today's playfulness and stories of rascals who have met their just desserts, what I sense here is a different kind of spirit – the spirits of people who have come here over the years, to find brief respite from their lives of service in the larger world.

Walking back from a hike to Box Canyon yesterday, past the casitas and the longhouse, I could hear the laughter of missionary kids chasing each other down the dusty road while their parents simply rested. I saw college age volunteers sneaking off, a little before quitting time, for an impromptu party. I saw couples carefully pick their way down from their rooms on the mesa on their way to dinner and an evening program. I saw a place that was in, but not of, the world, humming with activity.

The grandeur of Ghost Ranch – its sheer size and vistas – can also be found in the lives of the people who have come and gone from this place over the years, and in the programs that it offers: People who had a global understanding long before that word came to represent transnational exploitation. People who came to stretch themselves and to stretch others in the sharing of their experiences of the wider world.

Thanks to the steadfastness of a number of Witherspoon members, we share in this legacy. Every summer, you can count on a Witherspoon Ghost Ranch course offering that deals with justice issues, including a course next summer.

We have also decided to stretch ourselves even more in the global arena by financially supporting a volunteer to the Sabeel center in Palestine and in general, engaging more directly and intentionally with the larger world. Look for more details in this issue of *Network News* as well as future ones.

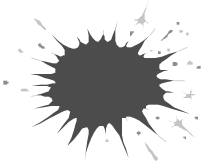


Trina Zelle speaking to the Witherspoon Luncheon crowd.

If you have never joined your fellow Witherspooners at Ghost Ranch, you are missing a lot. It's not too early to start planning for next summer. Hope to see you there.

Trina Zelle

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The Editor's Spot

Acting for peace ... marching to close the School of the Americas

by Doug King

Last month, for the first time, your Editor was privileged to be present for part of the annual November action to close the School of the Americas, now renamed as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC).

I can only report on some of the things I saw and heard that day (Saturday, November 18, 2006); I was not able to stay through Sunday, when the main actions took place.

For the latest and most complete reports, go to the website of the School of the Americas Watch <http://www.soaw.org/new/>

A friend and I arrived after a two-hour drive from Atlanta, just in time for the breakfast of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. Some 50 or 60 people filled a dining room to enjoy breakfast, and to hear brief presentations from Peace Fellowship leaders and others. Marilyn White, the PPF person who organized the breakfast (and much more), opened the festivities – and indeed there was a festive sense about this gathering. She introduced Kelly Wesselink, one of the co-moderators of the Fellowship, who then introduced Joel Hanisek, the Presbyterian Church's representative at the United Nations; he spoke briefly about our church's efforts, in cooperation with many other faith groups, to further and deepen the UN's work for peace.

Ann Barstow then told of the Colombian Accompaniment Program, describing it as "an incredible experience in peacemaking," where North American Presbyterians have learned from our brothers and sisters in Colombia "the price that is to be paid for standing against evil."

Rick Ufford-Chase, former moderator of the PC(USA) and now Executive Director of the Peace Fellowship, talked of his visit to Kinshasa, and the Presbyterian Church of the Congo, during his moderatorial term. Leading one service of worship he read from Psalm 92, which offers thanksgiving after deliverance from enemies. He highlighted verse 12: "The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God." And that kind of joy in God's work, he said, "is what I've been feeling during my time with PPF."

He went on to describe some of the current and planned projects of PPF, including a major endowment campaign. He spoke also of a large, non-violent, inter-faith witness of peace which is being planned for Washington, DC, on March 9 or 16. It will include an act of civil disobedience – which he prefers to call an act of obedience to God. He urged the group to begin work now to get 5,000 Presbyte-

"Let Justice Roll Down"

The Witherspoon Society Mission

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

Our mission is:

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

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

rians to that event, to say “get out of Iraq, support our troops by bringing them home, and No to torture.” He promised to have more information on his blog, hopefully within a couple weeks.

Other events that he mentioned included the No2Torture conference in Los Angeles, January 19-20; a trip to the Middle East after Easter; and a seminar for theologians and ethicists at Columbia Seminary next fall, in which they will be invited to engage in “imaging a world without torture.”

The Peace Fellowship is also planning to create a “circle of elders,” who will serve as mentors to college and seminary students, helping them to explore peacemaking as a vocation.

Finally, Rick described plans now being considered to form a “Presbyterian Peace Corps,” in which people would volunteer 5 to 10 hours of their time each week for organizing peacemaking programs. This would involve giving people particular tasks, and organizing around those tasks. This would give people specific ways to channel their own passions for peacemaking, and would help build the Peace Fellowship as well. “I learned as Moderator,” he said, “that money always follows mission and passion.”



Three Presbyterians ready to cross the line for peace: Don Coleman, Julienne Oldfield, and Phil Gates (Photo by Tom Driver)

The Peace Fellowship gathering drew to a close with a brief service of commissioning for the three Presbyterians who had chosen to “cross the line” during the demonstration the next day. Don Beisswenger, who served 6 months in prison in 2004 for performing the same act of witness in 2003, introduced the three people: Phil Gates, Don Coleman, and Julienne Oldfield. The three of them, said Beisswenger, “are engaged in the struggle for faith



The group commissions the three who will cross the line. (Photo by Tom Driver)

and for justice.” Each of them spoke of what had moved them to take this action, and they all told of how their own visits to places like Nicaragua and Colombia had impacted them.

Everyone in the room was then invited to join in a laying on of hands, as the three witnesses knelt in the center of the group and we united in prayer for them as they faced the costs they might have to pay for their faithful witness.

After the breakfast, many of us went to the Columbus Convention Center, where a plenary session was held to provide orientation and information for the actions Saturday afternoon and Sunday at the gates of Fort Benning. We were told that the witness in 2005 drew over 19,000 people, and that 20,000 were expected for today’s action. (The SOAW reports on their website that there were actually 22,000 present for the Sunday vigil and march, and the closing Return to Life Ritual.)

Among all the announcements and reports during the plenary session, two stood out for me. One was given by Pam Bowman [at least I think that’s who it was], the SOAW’s Legislative Coordinator, about current efforts to get legislation through Congress. She declared that last year they came within 15 votes of cutting funding in House for the School of the Americas/WHINSEC, and said that “after this election, the chances are better.” She encouraged people to urge their own legislators to join as co-sponsors of the bill that will likely be introduced again by Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA). The best outcome, she said, would be a suspension of SOA funding plus an investigation of its activities; if a legislator is unwilling to

do that, he or she can be encouraged at least to support defunding.

Later, Lisa Sullivan Rodriguez, SOAW's Latin America Coordinator, reported on one important new development: seven Latin American countries – El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Paraguay, Ecuador and Venezuela – were to see similar actions this weekend calling for the closing of the School of the Americas.



Sitting in the sun for songs and speeches

Two observations:

Protesting can be fun. The atmosphere on Saturday afternoon, as thousands of people strolled up and down the road leading up to the gates of Fort Benning, felt a little like a state fair: warm sunshine, blue skies, people enjoying themselves deeply. Folks were obviously meeting old friends, getting acquainted with new ones, chatting earnestly with people at the 100 or so tables set up along the side of the road. The Peace Fellowship had a table there for the first time, and Marilyn White commented that it was providing a great opportunity to connect with people, including many Presbyterians, who have no particular connection with the Peace Fellowship. People were networking on a grand scale!

These people were deeply serious about the cause that brought them together, but they were clearly rejoicing in their acting together for peace and justice.

And the other thing:

This was a gathering of “young and old together,”

without a lot in the middle. The number of people in their twenties, plus late teens and early thirties, was impressive and very encouraging. There were lots of college and university sweatshirts. (There was a group of students from McCormick at the Peace Fellowship breakfast, and we saw groups from many colleges at the Saturday afternoon witness, including Warren Wilson College.) Then there were lots of gray heads (and beards, of course, though not all of us had those). I heard some-one comment the other day that the “me generation” is being succeeded by the “we generation,” which values being connected with others, and working with others to make life, and the world, better for us all. Well, they were at Fort Benning in force (if it's OK to use that word for a non-violent group).

So along with the joy I sensed in the crowd, there was hope – great hope for all of us and for the world.

You can help Witherspoon grow!

The Witherspoon Society, like any other group, needs to keep attracting new members to grow both in size and in effectiveness.

You can help us gain new members, by

- encouraging friends to read *Network News*, or visit our website, and to consider joining
- giving them gift memberships for a year
- creating a group of progressive Presbyterians in your area, perhaps even your presbytery, and using Witherspoon as a basis for coming together, thinking and acting.

We want to help in any way we can!

Contact Membership coordinator John Harris, or Membership Secretary Doug King (see p. 31) for suggestions, free brochures or copies of *Network News*

Witherspoon goes global by adopting a PC(USA) Mission Volunteer

by Peter Barnes-Davies

At last year's "Dancing with God" conference at Stony Point, many of us met Wes Wilkinson, a staff person in the Worldwide Ministries Division of the PC(USA). Like myself, Wes was one of several handfuls of people who were excited about the emerging partnership between Witherspoon and Worldwide Ministries. Since the Stony Point conference, Wes contacted Trina Zelle, our co-moderator, to ask a specific question: would the Witherspoon Society be willing to "adopt" a long-term PC(USA) mission volunteer who would start her service in Jerusalem beginning November 2006?

An emphatic "yes!" was our final answer. Witherspoon indeed has "gone global" in this "adoption," and I am personally thankful and overjoyed. I myself served as a Long-Term Mission Volunteer from 1996 - 1999 in Africa, both Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Indeed, my passion for international service and my commitment to cross-cultural sharing in faith is the primary reason why I joined the ranks of "officers" in the Society. Given my six years of service with the Worldwide Ministries Division, I hope to encourage further strengthening in the bonds of mutual enrichment between the Society and Worldwide Ministries (realizing, of course, that given current restructuring at our national offices, a new name is being created for what we used to call Worldwide Ministries).

Shannon O'Donnell, our newly "adopted" mission volunteer, herself



Peter Barnes-Davies at Witherspoon board meeting

worked for nine months in the Worldwide Ministries Division. She assisted in the office of the life-changing Young Adult Volunteer Program, a program in which she previously served (from August '04 to August '05 in Thailand). Now in fall 2006, Shannon is living and serving at the Sabeel Ecumenical and Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. She has a two-year term with Sabeel, where she will serve as Assistant to the Director, Rev. Naim Ateek, with a special focus on research assistance. To learn more about Shannon's work, please read her article in this issue of Network News, and look for more articles from her in future issues.

What does it mean precisely that the Witherspoon Society has adopted Shannon as "our" mission volunteer? For one, the board of officers has pledged our financial support to Shannon's ministry. Through the PC(USA)'s Joining Hearts and Hands campaign, we are giving \$100

per month for the entire two years of Shannon's term of service. Beyond this financial support, we have also pledged to support Shannon - and Sabeel - with our prayers, our gifts of learning, and our capacity for solidarity and just action. Indeed, I believe our "adoption" of Shannon allows us Witherspooners to actively pursue, in one effort, many of the stated mission goals of our organization. (See p. 3 for the Witherspoon mission statement.)

Please join me in giving thanks for this recent expression of the growing partnership between Witherspoon Society and the Worldwide Ministries Division. Please lend your ears, your eyes, your voice, and your prayers to the support of "our" mission volunteer, Shannon O'Donnell. And please give generously to the Society so that we might more faithfully and readily fulfill the pledge of financial resources that we made. In so doing, let us all honor and remember the One who calls us, who sends us, and who sustains us - wherever our place of service may be.

Peter Barnes-Davies is a member at large of the Witherspoon board, and is currently a 4th year M.Div. student at San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Report from Jerusalem

by Shannon O'Donnell, Presbyterian Mission Volunteer

Beginning with Hope

From the generous contributions I received from various sources, including the Witherspoon Society, I have been living and working in Jerusalem for the past month. During my two-year appointment, I will be working at Sabeel.

Sabeel is a grassroots organization that advocates for peace with justice and provides an ecumenical ministry within the local Christian community as well as interfaith work between Christians and Muslims. I am the assistant to Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, the Founder and Director of Sabeel.

I arrived just in time to help with Sabeel's 6th International Conference. This event brought participants from 30 different local and international communities, focusing on the theme of the Forgotten Faithful, referring to the Palestinian Christians. Jean Zaru, a founding member of Sabeel, was the first keynote speaker. She began by stating:

These are very hard days in Palestine. The settlement expansion and the construction of the Wall continue unabated. International law and UN resolutions sit collecting dust. While the political landscape has changed dramatically and global powers maneuver a response, humanitarian aid and military violence against civilians is used like a playing card without regard to ordinary families struggling to secure their daily bread.

During such times as these, it is necessary to name the atrocities, to name our individual and collective pain. For it often goes unheard. Voicing it always includes risk but is nonetheless crucial, for with the cry of pain begins the formation of a counter community around an alternative perception of reality. Thus, the act of crying out and groaning is at once an act of subversion and an act of hope.



Near my house in Beit Hanina

Jean is a Palestinian woman living under Israeli military rule, and at the same time finds herself in a traditional culture. Her life has been devoted to the struggle for liberation—for Palestinians, for women, and for all peoples. She has done this through her work in her own community and internationally. For many years, Jean taught religion and ethics at the Friends Schools in Ramallah.

Finding Justice, furthering Hope

Most of my work during the conference was with the local and international volunteers. They came early, worked hard, and stayed late to do all the little things that it takes to pull off a big event such as this. This was a traveling conference, beginning in Jerusalem, moving on to Jericho, to Ramallah, to Nazareth, and ending in Galilee.

The international volunteers were chosen based on their previous work experience in the region. Several had participated in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program, an initiative of the World Council of Churches to monitor and report violations of human rights. It is a program

developed as a response to Israel's violation of internationally accepted norms and principles of human rights based on the Geneva Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Ian Alexander, from the UK, was a volunteer who spent this past summer working with the Accompaniment Program and came to help with the conference. Regarding his experience this summer, Ian wrote:

Israel is a state, and no state should be above the law, even when it is born out of tragic circumstances. There is a huge injustice being committed which only the end of occupation can begin to redress. Justice is the guiding light and is applicable to Israeli and Palestinian alike. The central injustice here for this moment in history is occupation and until it ends there can be no true peace for Israel, for Palestine, or for the region.

Eric Fistler, from the U.S., was in the same Program and spent his summer in Bethlehem. Eric also came to volunteer with the conference. Of his time observing despair at

the checkpoints, Eric wrote:

Despair stems from a variety of sources. The first is the extreme difficulty, if not the impossibility, to visit Jerusalem. Two men whom I see regularly at Checkpoint 300 (the only passage for Southern West Bank residents to travel to Jerusalem) are lucky enough to receive work permits which allow them to be in Jerusalem from 5 am until 7 pm. Unfortunately, their families have not been able to visit Jerusalem in two years -- not for Easter, not for shopping, not to see relatives. Jerusalem remains the major commercial center for the West Bank and thus restricted access to Jerusalem, means restriction. Not only restricted access to holy sites and family, but also to basic shopping and commercial needs and desires.

Despite all of this, my spirit remains hopeful, for God is indeed still at work here. In Bethlehem there has been a growing non-violent protest movement built on the examples of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. The spirits of the prophets of old and the Prince of Peace are still alive in this Holy Land working continually and non-violently to create not only a just peace, but reconciliation as well.

These movements are working to bring about the dream of many: a dream of reconciliation and peaceful co-habitation in which the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual security of all—Palestinians and Israelis—is achieved.

If I had read or heard these things from Jean, Ian, and Eric prior to my arrival to Jerusalem, I don't think I would have been able to understand what they mean. There is something valuable about being here. To hear and see the Wall being built less than a block from my apartment. Seeing young and old people sneak through the gap in the barbed-wire fence, where the Wall will soon be built, just to get into the city. I see the injustice, and already I have



An artist's flower blossoms on the Wall

come to view it as just how things are here. I suspect that is a coping mechanism, a way to rationalize the injustice I will never understand.

I have a lot of learning and listening to do during my time here. I hope to hear the stories of the older people, to hear how things used to be. To hear the dreams of the younger people, to see what they think their future will be. And I also hope to learn to read, write, and speak Arabic. All of this will take time, and I look forward to the next two years in this place people refer to as the Holy Land.

May God's Peace fill this Land,
Shannon O'Donnell
Mission Volunteer in Jerusalem
Shannon2006@gmail.com

What is Sabeel?

Their full name is the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, and they have explained the major elements of their identity and mission in a statement adopted at their 6th International Conference in Jerusalem, November 2-9, 2006. An excerpt is on page 10.

For the full statement, go to
<http://www.sabeel.org/etemplate.php?id=47>



This collage has been created by the people of Sabeel to represent their people, their situation, and their mission.

More on conflict and peacemaking in the Middle East

For excellent background material on the situation in Israel and Palestine, and the wider Middle East, the most recent issue of *Church & Society* is just what you'll want. With the theme, "To All the Children of Abraham: A Call for Peace in the Middle East," the July/August issue offers "visions of peace" from a Palestinian Christian, an American Muslim and an American Jew, along with a wide variety of views and statements on the conflict between Israel, Lebanon and Hizbollah.

You can order this issue (and other back issues) from Presbyterian Distribution Service, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396. Call (800) 524-2612; FAX (502) 569-8030. Use the PresbyNet inbox PDS Orders, or go through the *Church & Society* website to the Marketplace: www.pcusa.org/churchandsociety. The PDS order number is 72-431-06-606. Single copies are \$3.00; 10 or more are \$2.50, plus shipping and handling.

Even as we rejoice in the rich resources offered for many years by *Church & Society*, we lament its cloudy future as a result of the cuts in staff and programs in the General Assembly agencies of our church. Various people are seeking ways to continue its mission of providing resources on Presbyterian concerns for peace and justice, and you may be sure that the Witherspoon Society will support them in any way it can. If you have ideas, we'd like to hear from you!

SABEEL'S 6TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE STATEMENT (2006)

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. The Palestinian Christians are the descendants of the first community of believers who loved, believed in, and followed Jesus Christ. From the beginning they were a mixture of many ethnic and racial groups but all became members of the One Body of Christ, the Church.
2. In spite of the vicissitudes of history, they have maintained their faith in Christ during the last 2000 years amidst excruciating circumstances and in spite of the religious and political upheavals. Yet they have preserved the beautiful mosaic of their rich liturgical traditions and continue to bear witness. In order to strengthen the Christian presence and witness, it is mandatory, therefore, for Palestinian Christians to work together ecumenically. The hierarchies of the churches have a great responsibility to rise above denominationalism and commit themselves to nourishing closer bonds of love and acceptance among themselves.
3. Due to political and economic instability, many Palestinian Christians have been emigrating to the West. Internal as well as external factors have undermined their presence. Those who are in the Holy Land today make up less than 2% of the population.
4. Palestinian Christians are an integral part of the Palestinian people. They share the same aspirations and destiny as their Muslim sisters and brothers. All Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been living under an illegal Israeli occupation for almost 40 years. With many peace-loving people from around the world, whether faith-based or secular, Muslims and Christians continue to work for the end of the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a viable, independent and sovereign state in Palestine.
5. The Israeli Arab community – Christian and Muslim – continues to struggle for total equality with its Jewish counterpart. The obstacle, however, is the nature of the state of Israel. It is a Jewish state and not a state for all its citizens. Therefore, the struggle will continue until total equality is achieved.
6. Participants also observed the daily suffering of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and were acutely aware of the plight of Gazans, about 80 of whom (half of them civilians) were killed during the week of the conference. Conference participants were shocked by news of the Israeli army attack on an apartment building in Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip that resulted in the deaths of 19 civilians, primarily women and children. Moreover, during the conference day in Bethlehem, participants were unable to visit the Church of Nativity or to view the Wall in central Bethlehem because of funerals being held for 2 Palestinians who had been killed and had their family homes demolished by the Israeli army. Special prayers were raised for the victims and their families.
7. It was clear to participants that Palestinians and Israelis – Christians, Muslims, and Jews can live together in peace. The greatest obstacle to genuine reconciliation, however, stems from Israel's refusal to accept Palestinian rights to a state of their own within the 1967 borders, i.e. all of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. The conference called for strong response against the Israeli government policies of confiscation of Palestinian land in the West Bank, building and expanding of settlements, the presence of hundreds of checkpoints, and the building of the segregation Wall which separates Palestinians from Palestinians and takes their land and water. All these measures are eroding the possibility of the two state solution to the conflict.
8. Such obstacles to peace must be actively resisted both locally and internationally through non-violent methods like boycotts and Morally Responsible Investment. Moreover, international sanctions that make life untenable for people in the occupied territories must be immediately lifted.
9. Palestinian Christians have a mandate from Christ to be salt of the earth and light of the world. They have a vocation to remain in the land and maintain a prophetic voice for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

A new look at the mission imperative

by Britton W. Johnston

The Presbyterian church is probably not alone in having officially acknowledged that its mission work in the past has been oppressive of third world cultures. I speak of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in particular, because that is my experience.

In 1993 I was invited by the Presbytery of Santa Fe to serve as liaison between Charles H. Diebold Missions, Inc. and the various ecclesiastical authorities concerned with it. There was a bewildering array of said bodies: The Presbytery of Santa Fe, the Synod of the Southwest, the Presbiterio del Sur in Michoacán, Mexico, the Iglesia Nacional Presbiteriana de México, and an international mission board called Misión Conjunta, supervising the mission activities of the Presbyterian Church (USA) within Mexico. My task was to make sure that Diebold Missions, a private mission organization, was receiving the approval of all these authorities prior to soliciting money within the PC(USA). I was a brand new pastor, but I spoke Spanish and had some intercultural experience, so they asked me and I took on the job.

Hector Zavaleta, the Associate Executive for Hispanic Ministries in the Synod of the Southwest, urged the Synod to block the approvals I sought. His opinion of Diebold Missions was that it followed the paternalistic pattern of the bad old days. Hector and I were at odds with each other at times, but I came to respect his point of view. He had grown up a Presbyterian in Mexico City in the 1940's. He told me of his resentment that U.S. missionaries treated him and his people as inferiors. The northerners kept control of the funds. They were not subtle about their attitude. They were out to "save" the Mexicans from their sin. Mexican Presbyterians had to fall into line. It stung.

Such pain led to changes in the ways that the U.S. church did mission. Beginning in the 1970's, when the project of de-colonization had been underway in Latin America for some years, many third world Presbyterians decided that they would de-colonize their national churches. They asked the missionaries, politely, to leave until such time as they might be invited back. The missionaries, acknowledging their ethnocentric sins, obliged. Agreements were

made that thenceforth the churches in the host countries would determine the course of North American missions in their territories.

A new concept of North American mission emerged. It was variously called "mission in reverse" or "mission to North America" or "partnership in mission." The church in the United States began to welcome missionaries into its midst from the formerly colonized nations. We hoped to learn from these international missionaries how to repent of our ethnocentrism. We wanted to know how the church could grow so fast in the third world when it was shrinking in the United States and Europe. We wondered how cultures other than our own might embrace the Reformed faith in their own unique ways.

Now, instead of "bringing the Gospel to the unreached peoples," we engage in mission in the form of "partnership" or "accompaniment" with brothers and sisters in the faith. We attempt to establish mission partnership relationships with the third world churches, which direct the work.

This is a very tricky course to steer. Since my experience in Mexico, I've participated in PC(USA) mission work with mission partners from Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. I have traveled with my wife Danna Larson to Cuba and Colombia, where we have worked with the Presbyterian churches. In November of 2000, mission authorities from North and South gathered at CANIP, the Cuban Presbyterian camp in Central Presbytery, for a week-long discussion of the matter of ethical mission relationships. The relationship between the North Americans and the third world churches, it was said over and over, is not a matter of money. It's about friendship and partnership. Except for when it's not. When the Cubans ask for help to repair a ruined church building, or in Africa when the Congolese ask for money for a hospital project, the claims about "only friendship" ring a little hollow. Dependency is hard to avoid, even when we want to. The richer church is always tempted to try to call the shots. The third world churches, for their part, must constantly struggle with the problems of dependency toward foreign churches and rivalry toward their national peers. Since they are poor communities, their tremendous needs can quickly turn the relationship into one of begging or guilt-tripping the Americans into giving them money. Third world synods must constantly ride herd on local churches trying to get a piece of the action when the Americans come to call. North American financial support becomes a source of friction, as people ask why one congregation gets the money, and not another.



As we struggle with the flaws in the partnership model, there does seem to be emerging yet another new concept of mission. The partnership model is based on the goal of de-colonization and the theology of liberation. The emerging model will be based on a new understanding of salvation as the generation of community solidarity.

Nobody really does (or ought to) take seriously any more the idea that God is interested in punishing sinners. But once God's metaphysical wrath is no longer of concern, other models of salvation come into play. The liberationist understanding of salvation is the establishment of just socio-economic systems. James Alison, a Roman Catholic theologian famous for his work on religious violence and oppression of gays in the church, has spent many years studying and teaching in Brazil, Bolivia, and Mexico. I asked him for his assessment of Liberation Theology at a conference back in 2001. Even back then, he felt that it had petered out. The theology of liberation has largely failed, not simply because the wealthy classes have opposed it. Liberation theology has failed primarily because poor people do not see it as having compelling relevance. It requires too much pedagogy, an expensive commodity available mainly to middle class, rather than poor, Christians. Furthermore, Liberation Theology fails to take the full depth of human sin into account. Oppression by the wealthy classes cannot be the basis of the world's fallenness. There is obviously far too much sin among the poor themselves, for this to be true.

Nevertheless, there can be an understanding of salvation that honors the concerns of Liberation Theology and widens the understanding of salvation without returning to the personalistic and metaphysical superstitions of the bad old days. Not salvation from God's metaphysical wrath; not salvation from systemic oppression; but salvation from our own human wrath – our resentments, our rivalries, and our passion for scapegoating. Human wrath is what destroys the potential of community. It is from this that all human beings still need to be saved. This notion of salvation calls for the winning of converts as a matter of the formation of disciples who are capable of putting community welfare ahead of their own selfish desires. To live in a community of peace, harmony and mutual concern is salvation indeed.

Here we can gain valuable insight from the anthropological theory of René Girard. He offers us a new understanding of the function of religious faith. Girard insists that what is fundamental and unique about human beings is our enormous capacity and compulsion to imitate one another. Through imitation, or *mimesis*, we acquire language, culture, and desire. Yes, *desire*. We want what

other people want. This leads to conflict over the objects of desire, producing in turn, anger, which is imitated to produce violence. The most fundamental threat to human existence has always been our own violence. Not starvation, not disease, not predators – but our own violence. The function of religion is to manage this violence. The most primitive religions use human sacrifice as the means to do this. Sacrifice, according to Girard, is a controlled dose of violence to prevent runaway violence from destroying everyone. After a sacrificial ritual, people are more inclined to cooperate with each other and to be at peace with each other. Religion maintains social solidarity. Pagan religion does this through sacrifice.

It works, to some extent. What made our nation come together after 9/11? Why do neighbors get to know each other better after a big disaster? Why does national pride surge (temporarily) in time of war? At least in part, all of these are instances of the sacrificial mechanism generating solidarity. This would be perfect, except for the fact that the sacrificial mechanism requires that somebody become the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat.

Girard argues that the Gospel reveals the sin of this religious violence. It tells the story of a sacrificial event – the crucifixion of Christ – from the point of view of the sacrificial lamb. This has the effect of subverting the whole sacrificial system. But the Gospel does more than simply deconstruct the “old time religion.” It offers an alternative, a means of maintaining social solidarity without violence.

By no means does this take us out of the biblical basis for our faith. In fact, the concern for community is the preeminent concern of Paul's epistles, the oldest of the New Testament scriptures. The Kingdom of God is a community of people who imitate Christ, rather than each other. Or, more precisely, they imitate each other imitating Christ. Christ does not enter into competition. He “does not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but empties himself.” Christ surrenders himself to becoming the scapegoat for the sake of humanity. We who imitate Christ share in his death and resurrection.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We

know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

— Romans 6:3-8

Imitating Christ, we are liberated from the desire and wrath that emerge when we imitate our neighbors. Instead of desiring to outdo our neighbors, we desire only the well-being of our neighbors. This generates a new and unique kind of social solidarity. An entirely new kind of religious life emerges.

There is a paradox in this, however, which is that (if Girard is right) selfish desires emerge from the very same community whose welfare God would have us put ahead of those desires. We must not do what the community impels us to do; rather, we must serve the community in the way that God guides us to do. For example, the world teaches us that it is always better to be more successful than our neighbors, but accepting that teaching condemns us to a lifetime of competitive rivalry with them, and this attitude will always tend to undermine community solidarity. Salvation consists precisely in the capacity to transcend the community's implicit demands for the sake of the community's well-being. This is the essence of Christ's kenosis. This is the fundamental function of religion, at last fully defined.

The sin of Judas was to hearken to the values of the world rather than to the values of the Kingdom of God, and so he exploited the fellowship of the Kingdom to advance his position in the world. This is the "sin against the Holy Spirit" which will never be forgiven. Ananias and Sapphira, and the ones at Thessalonica who would not work, and the rich in Corinth who failed to "discern the body" are all examples of this sin.

There is absolutely nothing that we can do as a missionary church that lack of community solidarity can't ruin. A fine school can be destroyed by infighting over administrative prestige; a grant of money can be wasted on a community that responds with envy toward those who received it.

Danna and I served for four months in the Accompanier program of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia in 2005. Pastora Gloria Ulloa, one of our friends in Colombia, told us of the self-imposed stagnation of certain indigenous communities near Pital, where she serves. In these communities, they consider it dangerous to try to improve things. She said that they're willing to accept improve-

ments when an outside agency brings them in, but otherwise, improvements produce resentments. So, to avoid conflicts, they try not to change things. How can such a community hope to participate in its own development, when their method of maintaining solidarity depends on stagnation?

We encountered community organizations suffering from rivalries within the leadership. Sadly, these are precisely the organizations upon which we depend to develop community solidarity. We were instructed that, as an ethical principle, we must never give charity to individuals, because it produces resentments. This applied to members of the Presbyterian church as well as to displaced people in squatter settlements. Charity might be an immediate help, but it does long-term damage because of resentment. This problem is by no means limited to developing countries. Among churches in the United States of America, it is almost a sad cliché that so many of them are holding themselves back in precisely this way.

Although it seems like such a simple and obvious thing, solidarity is elusive. All it should take is a recognition that nothing will improve unless the whole community unites. Once people see this, they will naturally decide to cooperate; then things should begin to change. But that isn't what happens. People argue. They compete for prestige. They become resentful and stay home. They deliberately weaken the very organization they need to improve their lot, and they do it for the most petty reasons of personal pride. The one thing that the displaced communities need above all else is community solidarity, and even though such a thing ought to be simple and without cost, it turns out to be very difficult and expensive to establish. Solidarity ought to be the least expensive thing in the world. But in fact community solidarity is the only thing that has ever been truly expensive. Again, if Girard is right, then the need for community solidarity is the very origin of the concept "expensive." All human cultures – all our sacrifices and temples and wars and economic systems – exist precisely to sustain solidarity among us. Primitive sacrifices are risky and difficult, but without them primal people would not survive their own wrath. Systems of exchange, according to Girard and others, have the primary function of reconciling people and heading off violent conflict. An economic system motivates us to manufacture trade goods rather than simply raiding our neighbors to take what they have. This is not to say that solidarity is the most expensive thing we do – it is to say that solidarity in the primitive or secular sense *is the origin and essence of the very notion of "expensive" itself*. The costliness of solidarity (other than Jesus' model for it) is one of many insights to emerge

from Girard's anthropological theory.

Three Models of Solidarity

Human cultures exist in great diversity, yet there are basic patterns that appear with only superficial variations. Fundamental to human culture are the methods of controlling rivalries and resentments to maintain cooperation and solidarity. There exist only three basic methods by which cultures do this. I call them here the "Scapegoating Model," the "Secular Model" and the "Reign of God."

The Scapegoating Model: The most primitive means of establishing community solidarity is scapegoating. Accuse a witch; demand the death of a child to appease a god; condemn the sinner; blame the Jews. A common enemy has a dramatic power to pull the community together. As every demagogue from Nero to Hitler has known, this has an immediate visceral effectiveness. It has disadvantages of course. Not only is it violent and immoral; it prevents cultural progress. Creative thinking is possible only in an environment where people aren't afraid of being the next scapegoat if they try something new. But in a scapegoating environment, it's precisely the creative thinker who makes a convenient scapegoat by being "different."

The Secular Model: That great leftist community organizer Saul Alinsky based his practice of community organizing on the theory that people will come together around their self-interest. He managed to have significant success with this in Back of the Yards Chicago in the 1950s. His disciples continue to make use of it in the Industrial Areas Foundation, and even in the Presbyterian Self Development of People program. The idea is that the local community identifies a shared need and comes together to promote its resolution, building a grassroots power base in the process. This has considerable value, especially for a church mission organization trying hard not to impose religious values on people. It's a secular model of human nature, and as such the church can deploy it so as to steer clear of accusations of dogmatism and paternalism.

The trouble is that it's basically wrong. Alinsky depended heavily upon the churches in his community organizing work. Were people really coming together around their self-interest, or around their common religion? Moreover, it is usually clear to people that their interests lie in community solidarity; our species has known this since the world began. It didn't take Saul Alinsky to make us aware of this. The question is not whether we recognize the need, but whether we can overcome the obstacles – obstacles that exist within our own hard hearts. Commu-

nists thought that the self-interest of the proletariat would unite it to overthrow their oppressors. As it turned out, only resentment of their oppressors did the job, and communism fell back into that old-time religion: hold the cause together by drenching the earth with blood. Capitalism, by combining consumerism with nationalism and colonialism, continues to pull off this trick, becoming more openly violent every year (the next twenty-five years may well prove that the fascists were the ultimate winners in World War II).

The Reign of God: This model for community solidarity, following the example of Christ, is based on the revelation that we don't have to care if we lose. We won't die; in fact, if we stop caring about winning and losing, we'll discover that there's a lot more to life. It does in fact become Abundant. This has stunningly powerful effects on community solidarity. Our neighbor is no longer our model/obstacle/rival (to use Girard's terminology), but a fellow member of one body. This is the only real alternative to the Old Time Religion (also known as the "sin of the world").

Implications for Mission

Girard's theory deconstructs the concept of culture so that it loses its (currently fashionable) quasi-sacred status. Culture is merely the means of managing human rivalries. It is a social technology, and as such, it can be improved. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is such an improvement. Evangelization is in effect a development strategy.

Going into all the world to make disciples is a necessary part of this model of development, certainly no less than building bridges and dams means sending engineers out into the world. The receiving, or host, culture benefits from the presence of Christian outsiders because as outsiders they are less likely to become mimetic rivals. They bring a fresh mimetic model into the system so that cultural structures of rivalry can be disrupted in favor of something better. So those Colombian indigenous people who can't make improvements unless they come from outside, can begin to make progress with the help of outside missionaries.

In effect, what I propose here is a return to the old model of mission to "unreached people." There is a difference, however, in the motivation. Rather than an attempt to rescue people from a metaphysical judgment, the focus is on saving people from a universal human problem, namely,

Continued in "Mission imperative," page 18

Witherspoon Board reaffirms unity of the church, laments divisive moves

The Board of the Witherspoon Society, meeting from September 13 through 16 at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, adopted a statement expressing concern about the actions and statements by some Presbyterians, congregations and presbyteries that seem to violate the spirit of “harmony and covenanted partnership” that were fostered by the Theological Task Force and experienced by many at the 217th General Assembly in Birmingham.

Here is the full text of the statement:

Witherspoon Society Board Statement September 15, 2006

“Oh how good and pleasant it is when kindred dwell in unity.”
Psalm 133:1, NRSV

The members of Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church (TTF), who met together for four years, have provided the PCUSA a model of mutual discussion and discernment, appreciation and trust. The 217th General Assembly, meeting in June of 2006 in Birmingham, Alabama, affirmed the value of both the process and the substance of what the TTF had done by overwhelmingly adopting recommendations 1 through 4, which called for harmony and covenanted partnership in dealing with potentially divisive issues.

While Recommendation 5 passed by a more narrow margin, a clear majority of commissioners adopted the Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of the Book of Order. Briefly, the Assembly’s approval reaffirmed G-6.0108 of the Book of Order in three ways: the Constitution is authoritative; candidates for ordination may state their “departures” regarding particular points in the Constitution; and governing bodies have the responsibility to determine whether a “departure” is contrary to the essentials of Reformed faith, polity or practice.

Though there were differing assessments of the TTF’s recommendations, from a variety of perspectives, the mood following the vote of the Assembly was one of mutual affirmation and reconciliation consistent with the actions just taken, (particularly in adopting Recommendations 1 – 4) in the spirit of living together in harmony and covenanted partnership.

This unique moment of reconciliation at the Assembly makes the attitude and the subsequent statements and actions of some Presbyterians and presbyteries especially disheartening. It may be that many Presbyterians have not taken the time to read or interpret the TTF’s report or the AI in the wider context. It is our hope that misinterpretations can be corrected by study and discussion. Pastors have a special responsibility to give an accurate interpretation of both the Task Force report and the Book of Order.

We are also dismayed and appalled that some congregations, under the leadership of their sessions and pastors, have chosen to act in ways that defy and destroy the trust relationship that has been so painstakingly developed since the TTF’s inception in 2001, and that a majority in some presbyteries have affirmed these destructive and unconstitutional actions. We regret that some have decided to leave the Presbyterian Church (USA) and hope that any such action will not be permanent. We caution against giving in to a spirit of anarchy and misinterpretation by ignoring the procedures clearly spelled out in the Book of Order for pastors and congregations to leave the Presbyterian Church (USA).

We pledge to join with all Presbyterians in carrying out the letter and the spirit of both the AI and our broader Presbyterian tradition: to defend our Constitution against anarchy and misinterpretation, to seek more thorough discernment, and to assist candidates and committees as we all try to live our way into the new opportunities brought to us by the Theological Task Force, the actions of the 217th General Assembly, and the Reformed heritage upon which the Presbyterian Church (USA) stands.

So what is the “Presbyterian tradition”?

Seeing ourselves through the lens of our past

By Mitch Trigger, Secretary/Communicator of the Witherspoon Society, and recently called as co-pastor, with his wife, Sue, of First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway, NJ.

There’s a phrase that I hear used a lot, but often in a mistaken context – “Presbyterian tradition.” I find it interesting that it is most often used as a goal we are supposed to return to, a way of doing things that we have strayed from. I agree. One of the problems for the Presbyterian Church (USA) today is that it has veered far away from its “tradition” and I think now would be a good time for us to return to that tradition.

But that’s only if we really know what that “tradition” is. I was reminded of it as I have been reading the reactions of many people to this summer’s General Assembly action regarding the report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity. The report itself and the reactions by individuals, churches, and even presbyteries seemed strangely familiar. See if you don’t agree after reading this long excerpt (ending near the bottom of p. 17) from an article written for *New Horizons*, a publication of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

The center of the progressive movement was in the Presbytery of New York, which pressed the liberal agenda on three fronts. First, on May 21, 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick, the Baptist supply pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, rallied liberals with his famous sermon, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” Although the sermon was a plea for tolerance, most Presbyterians – liberal and conservative – would have answered the title’s rhetorical question in the affirmative, because it appeared that the conservatives were strong enough to force the liberals out of the church. A year later, the Presbytery took the provocative step of ordaining two graduates of Union Seminary who could not affirm the virgin birth of Christ.

Finally, the Presbytery convened a gathering in Auburn, New York, in December 1923. It produced “An Affirmation designed to safeguard the unity and liberty of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.” The Auburn Affirmation ques-

tioned the constitutionality of General Assembly deliverances that proclaimed certain doctrines as necessary and essential beliefs for Presbyterian ministers, and it went on to describe those doctrines (the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the vicarious atonement, Jesus’ resurrection, and his miracles) merely as theories about the Bible’s message. Within a year, the Auburn Affirmation secured the signatures of 1,300 Presbyterian ministers.

Conservatives fought back in the General Assembly of 1924, when they narrowly elected a conservative moderator, Clarence McCartney, and managed to secure the dismissal of Fosdick from the First Presbyterian pulpit. The Assembly failed to take action against the Auburn Affirmationists, however, as many conservatives believed that they lacked sufficient votes to win that battle.

Instead, a showdown took place a year later at the General Assembly of 1925, meeting in Columbus, Ohio. Many commissioners were convinced of the credal infidelity of the Presbytery of New York. Henry Sloane Coffin, however, was prepared to defend the Presbytery. He preached the preceding Sunday at the First Congregational Church of Columbus, the former pulpit of social gospeler Washington Gladden. In his sermon, “What Liberal Presbyterians Are Standing For,” he put forth his case: “We question whether we have any right to call ourselves a Christian Church, if we exclude from its ministry any whom Christ manifestly does not exclude from the gift of His Holy Spirit.”

The Assembly elected Charles Erdman of Princeton Seminary as its moderator. Although Erdman’s theology was evangelical, J. Gresham Machen considered him to be the candidate of modernists and indifferentists. Upon his election, Erdman quickly proved Machen right. He held a two-hour private meeting with Coffin, listening to his plan to lead the Presbytery of New York and its sympathizers out of the Assembly, should the Judicial Commission rule unfavorably.

Desperately seeking to avoid a walkout, Erdman agreed to permit Coffin to read a protest if the Judicial Commission ruled against the Presbytery. The Commission did, in fact, determine that the Presbytery had acted improperly in ordaining men who could not affirm the virgin birth of Christ, which was “the established law” of the Church.

Conservatives seemed to be on the brink of victory, and liberals prepared to leave.

Then Coffin approached the platform of the assembly, as his biographer describes:

He was pale and showed the effects of the strained and sleepless nights during which he had been in conference seeking to avert this action. In a firm voice he read a prepared statement on behalf of the Commissioners of the Presbytery of New York protesting the decision as contrary to the constitution of the church and declaring the purpose of the New York Presbytery to maintain its constitutional rights in licensure.

But Coffin's threatened exodus did not take place, because of a bold and desperate move by Erdman. Yielding the chair to the vice moderator, Erdman proposed from the floor that the Assembly establish a special commission "to study the present spiritual condition of our Church and the causes making for unrest, and to report to the next General Assembly, to the end that the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Church may be assured."

Erdman's stroke of parliamentary genius was unanimously approved. Later that night he met with liberal commissioners and urged them not to leave the church until the Special Commission reported to the next assembly. Erdman then appointed fifteen committee members, mostly "respected loyalists." The most well known and influential member of the committee was his close friend, Robert E. Speer, secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, who would later clash with Machen over the latter's claim of modernism on the Board.

In the ensuing year, the Special Commission met four times. Machen argued before the Commission that the cause of the unrest in the church was "reducible to the one great underlying cause," which was the presence of modernism in it. Coffin countered that the differences were due to "misapprehension." Fighting this battle would "plunge the church into calamitous litigation and hinder us from doing our work and building the kingdom of God." "It is ruinous," he continued, "to divide existing forces. We ought to work harmoniously together and emphasize those things in which we agree."

In the unanimous report that the Commission pre-

sented to the 1926 Assembly, it agreed with Coffin that there was "evangelical unity" in the church. American Presbyterianism stood for toleration and progress, shaped by "two controlling factors":

One is, that the Presbyterian system admits to diversity of view where the core of truth is identical. Another is, the church has flourished best and showed most clearly the good hand of God upon it, when it laid aside its tendencies to stress these differences, and put the emphasis on the spirit of unity.

Coffin could not have authored a more agreeable conclusion. "It seems to be everyone's wish to keep the peace," he wrote.

When the Commission presented its report, Clarence McCartney, two years removed as the Assembly moderator, moved to excise certain sections and to dismiss the Commission. His older brother, Albert J. McCartney, rose in rebuttal with withering words of ridicule: "Clarence is all right, friends. The only trouble is he isn't married. If that old bachelor would marry, he would have less time to worry over other people's theology.... I know that if mother could come back, there would be room for him and for me to say our prayers in the same words on her knee at that old home of ours in western Pennsylvania. I believe there is room for him and for you and me, to say our prayers in identical language in the Presbyterian Church."

The younger McCartney's motion was denied, and in 1927 the General Assembly approved the final report of the Commission with only one dissenting vote. The effect was to grant freedom to the Presbytery of New York to reject the virgin birth of Christ as an essential tenet of the church, and to vindicate the signers of the Auburn Affirmation.

The report underscored that Presbyterian unity required the end of "all slander and misrepresentation" within the church.¹

As I said, strangely familiar and yet different. A commission appointed to look at issues dealing with the "peace, unity and purity of the church." At that time it was the "liberal" faction of the church that threatened to leave – something they didn't do. They recognized that all Presbyterians were called to share in carrying out Christ's mission in the world. For the next several decades, the Pres-

byterian Church would do just that as “Presbyterians sought a healing of the divisions among themselves in an effort to reunite and unite the PCUSA, the PCUS, and the UPCNA. They committed themselves to a desegregated society, and to sharing power with women as well as blacks in ecclesiastical affairs. Unhappy over a sterile and dangerous anti-communist mentality, they made efforts to de-escalate the ideological conflicts, East-West, and North-South, as fraternal workers with other Christian churches around the world.”²

It seems our “Presbyterian tradition” is the same one that the General Assembly was reminded of this summer by the PUP report – a tradition of understanding that our unity truly is in Jesus Christ and the work of peace and justice we have been called to continue on his behalf. Jesus said, “The poor will always be with us.” Today, he might add, “And those of us who claim to know how God works will always be with us.” We will always have theological differences but they seem somehow trivial if we recognize that our fighting and arguing have stopped us from doing the real work of the church. I hope that our “Presbyterian tradition” does not turn out to be the fighting itself.

Notes

¹ Dr. D.G. Hart is the director of fellowship programs and scholar in residence at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in Wilmington, DE; Mr. John R. Muether is the librarian at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL, and the historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; both are Orthodox Presbyterian ruling elders and members of the Committee on Christian Education. This passage, part of a longer article, is reprinted by permission from *New Horizons*, August/September 2005.

² James H. Smylie, *American Presbyterians: A Pictorial History*, (Journal of Presbyterian History, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, 1985), Volume 63 – Numbers 1 & 2, page 195

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our failure to love our neighbors as ourselves. Certainly this implies that missionaries from third world churches can help North Americans to live out the Gospel more faithfully; our newer model of “mission to North America” needs to continue. There is plenty of sin to go keep us all busy. Nevertheless, there is no denying the fact that a renewed model of mission must still be based on the old – and lately much despised – proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The author:

The Rev. Britton W. (“Britt”) Johnston has been on extended sabbatical following a 13 year pastorate in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is currently struggling to discern his vocation while residing in Wesley, Iowa with his wife Dana Larson.

PHEWA – the Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association – is holding its biennial Social Justice Conference in New Orleans, January 11-14, 2007.

Registration deadline is December 6. (The conference hotel will not hold rooms after that.)

The very appropriate theme is “You Shall be Called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Live in.” (Isaiah 58:12)

This vital event will be an opportunity to ...

- **Explore** the inequities and realities of failed systems — political, social, economic – using New Orleans as our reference point. What are the lessons for our home communities?
- **Learn** from local persons and organizations by visiting the neighborhoods. What is the current state of the rebuilding and is it a *just* rebuilding?
- **Hear** the voices of resistance, resilience and hope.
- **Experience** the spirit and soul of New Orleans through its music and art.

Learn more about the conference:

<http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/social-justice-biennial-conference.htm>

NCC member churches discuss new Social Creed

PC(USA) leads effort to commemorate 1908 creed with a new one

by Jerry Van Marter, Presbyterian News Service

ORLANDO, FL - November 16, 2006 – The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) has received for study the draft of a “social creed” that commemorates and builds upon the original Social Creed of the Churches of 1908 calling for economic and social justice. [See this draft on p. 20.]

“It is not enough to celebrate the centennial of the 1908 social creed,” said the Rev. Chris Iosso, a Presbyterian instrumental in the ecumenical development of the new document, entitled “A Social Creed for the 21st Century.

“It can strengthen the common witness of our communions on a broad range of social concerns - far broader than in 1908,” he told the NCC’s General Assembly here Nov. 9.

The 1908 social creed was originally formulated by Methodists and addressed primarily “sweat shop” and child labor.

Some of the issues addressed in the new creed that “were not touched upon in 1908,” Iosso said, are women in the workplace, temperance (alcohol and drug abuse), prison reform, racial justice, environment, peace and “the global framework that presses on us today.”

Indeed, the impact of globalization on the world’s social and economic order and sustainability of the earth’s resources give the new creed a far more international focus than was in the 1908 creed, Iosso noted. Its principal author, Frank Mason North, told the Federal Council of Churches (now the NCC): “The church must give itself fearlessly and passionately to the furtherance of all reforms by which it believes that the weak may be protected, the unscrupulous restrained, injustice abolished, equality of opportunity secured and wholesome conditions of life established. Nothing that concerns human life can be alien to the Church of Christ.”

The NCC’s Justice and Advocacy Commission will continue to work with the NCC’s 35 member communions on the development, circulation and use of the new creed in the run-up to the 2008 centennial commemoration.

Member churches adopted and adapted the 1908 creed for their own use, the same model that’s being pursued with the new creed, Iosso, coordinator of the PC(USA)’s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), told the assembly. For instance, he said, Methodists this time around are developing a prayer book and musical version to attract younger congregants to the creed.

Last summer’s 217th PC(USA) General Assembly approved a study and feedback process for Presbyterians as further work is done on the new social creed in preparation for the centennial celebration of the 1908 document.

ACSWP will continue to lead the PC(USA)’s study and use of the new social creed.

The Social Creed of 1908

We deem it the duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems. To us it seems that the Churches must stand - For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life. For the right of all men to the opportunity for self-maintenance, a right ever to be wisely and strongly safe-guarded against encroachments of every kind. For the right of workers to some protection against the hardships often resulting from the swift crisis of industrial change. For the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions. For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational disease, injuries and mortality. For the abolition of child labor. For such regulation of the conditions of toil for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community. For the suppression of the “sweating system.” For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practical point, and for that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life. For a release from employment one day in seven. For a living wage as a minimum in every industry, and for the highest wage that each industry can afford. For the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised. For suitable provision for the old age of the workers and for those incapacitated by injury. For the abatement of poverty. To the toilers of America and to those who by organized effort are seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor, and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor, this council sends the greeting of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.

A Social Creed for the 21st Century (Draft version, Nov. 1, 2006)

Remembering the prophetic Social Creed of the Churches of 1908, we respond to God's call to transform our social order toward justice and peace, and to address the 21st century's great challenges of globalization and sustainability. Hearing also concerns of churches and peoples around our globe, we pledge ourselves to specific practices of personal and social responsibility that reflect our Triune God's gracious will for all creation. We rejoice in the Biblical vision where all "shall long enjoy the work of their hands ... (and) ... not labor in vain or bear children of calamity." (Isaiah 65:22-23)

In faith, we celebrate the full humanity of each woman, man and child, all created in God's image, by standing for:

- Employment for all, at a family-sustaining living wage.
- Protection of workers from dangerous occupational conditions, injuries and death.
- Full civil, political and economic rights for all people, protected by new governance structures.
- Abolition of forced labor, human trafficking and the exploitation of children.
- The rights of workers to organize, and to participate in workplace decisions and productivity gains.
- Adequate time and resources to care for families without fear of work penalties.
- High quality public education for all, free from racial, gender or economic disparity.
- A fair, de-racialized criminal justice system, based on restorative justice and rehabilitation, including education and addiction recovery programs.

In love, despite the world's sufferings and evils, we honor the deep connections within our human family and seek to awaken a new spirit of cooperation by working for:

- Abatement of poverty, and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable.
- Universal healthcare.
- Safe, affordable housing, served by adequate public transportation.
- An effective program of social security during sickness, disability and old age.
- Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and provide greater opportunity for everyone within the common good.
- Just immigration policies that protect family unity, safeguard workers' rights, require employer accountability and foster international cooperation.
- Public service as a high vocation, with integrity in voting, campaign finance and lobbying.

In hope, we pledge to heal the environment, recognizing our responsibility for its health and our interdependence with Creation and one another, by working for:

- The adoption of simpler lifestyles, resisting the powerful institutions that shape our choices.
- Access for all to healthy food, clean water and air, with wise and equitable land stewardship.
- Sustainable use of all resources and promotion of alternative energy technologies.
- Equitable global trade that protects local economies, initiatives, cultures and livelihoods.
- Peacemaking through international cooperation and rule of law, mutual security rather than unilateral force, nuclear disarmament and a strengthened United Nations.
- Redirection of military spending to more peaceful and productive uses.
- Relationships of mutuality among the world's churches and faith communities.

With all those who labor and are heavy-laden, we commit ourselves to a culture of peace and freedom that embraces non-violent initiatives, human dignity and greater equality, with a deeper spirituality of inward growth and outward action. By these means, we witness to our hope in the God who makes all things new, whom we know in Jesus Christ.

The "Social Creed" of 1908: Some Background

Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon's Issues Analyst, presented a background paper on the "Social Creed" of 1908, which was published earlier in the Summer 2006 issue of Witherspoon's *Network News*.

It is also posted on our website, at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2004/social_creed.htm#teselle%20on%20background

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Theological musings

Some Reflections on the Social and Moral Witness of the PC(USA) in Our Global Context

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

Pressures toward global engagement abound today for governments, corporations, educational institutions, and even professional sports. Think of well-financed and seemingly ubiquitous travel seminars, concerns that Microsoft's new Windows system may violate European antitrust laws, or how difficult it has become to separate political questions about domestic employment from international policies and conditions. *The New York Times* recently reported that the NFL is considering a proposal to play regular season games abroad. (Live from Vienna, the Carolina Panthers vs. the Cincinnati Bengals?) And, of course, we have World Cup Soccer, not to mention quite competitive international tournaments in basketball and baseball, as well as the increasing participation of international players in Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League. In this essay, I want to reflect on the faithfulness and vibrancy of the social and moral witness of a particular church, the PC(USA), with an eye toward its global context.

The Current Ecclesial Circumstance

It is true that not only the PC(USA), but also many other churches, find themselves participating in a relatively common global situation. Yet this is hardly a formula for homogenization, since it is equally important to recognize the many different Christian churches in the world today, their distinctive stances and sub-traditions,

as well as their different geographical, social, and cultural contexts. Thus, when we talk about global Christianity, we need to take into account the differences and particularities as well as similarities and general trends.

Ponder a few unsystematic observations. Christianity today is growing rather rapidly in the Southern Hemisphere, where Pentecostalism seems especially vital in Latin America and in Africa. Orthodoxy enjoys new possibilities in Russia. Churches that began as missionary efforts on the part of European and North American Christian communities are sometimes now themselves missionary churches. (For example, several thousand Korean missionaries are now active outside their homeland and they have founded churches in other countries, such as the Korean Presbyterian Church of Sao Paulo.) Protestant and Catholic churches in Europe and North America find themselves in comparatively secular, consumerist, and pluralist societies, while other Christian churches are located in more traditional cultures many of which now are confronting more "western style" modern economies, social patterns, and political institutions.

The upshot is that almost all Christian churches find themselves within an increasingly interconnected, *global circumstance* characterized by intricate and far-flung economic interdependencies, and in which persons and communities often encounter diverse

social practices, secular institutions, values, and religious traditions. Their experiences of this circumstance differ because they are refracted through diverse socio-economic and political interests, as well as different cultures, ecclesiastical practices and sub-traditions. Thus, some Christians in Africa and in North America experience secularity as a threat, while some communities that are distinct minorities, such as the Evangelical Church of Egypt and the Waldensians in Italy, experience secularity as promise. Ecclesial organizations that span "traditional" and "modern" contexts, such as the Anglican Church and the Reformed Alliance, frequently experience significant tensions, especially over sexuality as well as the place and roles of women.

Therefore it quickly becomes apparent that there is no generic Christianity (just as there is no generic Islam or generic Hinduism). It also becomes apparent that the PC(USA), while it participates in the relatively common and contemporary global circumstance that influences so many churches, also bears a particular ecclesial and theological heritage in a highly particular and distinctive cultural context.

The PC(USA), Its Distinctive Tradition and Historical Contexts

Many things might be said about the *particular ecclesial and theological sub-tradition* of the PC (USA). One might note its historic insistence on the radical priority of grace in a manner that joins emphases on justification and sanctification, or its general preference for representative polities punctuated by checks and balances as well as its bias against hierarchies. Let me point to a conception of faithful living that, in conjunction with certain historical contexts, has tended to yield

a characteristic stance.

Among Mennonites and other Protestant groups that trace their heritage to the so called “left wing” of the Reformation of the 16th century (and many of whom historically are pacifist) a baseline for faithful living is radical discipleship. Among Lutherans, the relationship between law and gospel often rises to prominence. The Reformed tradition, from which Presbyterianism emerged, has tended to emphasize our faithful response to God’s sovereign and universal reign. This emphasis goes hand in glove with a *worldly impetus*. Since our REformed tradition affirms that no place or area of life lies beyond God’s universal governance, we are to respond faithfully to God in all places and in all areas of life. As a result, this particular sub-tradition has tended to stress our calling to participate faithfully (or both constructively and critically) in the activities and institutions of society, including family, commerce, law, and government. (Now you know one reason why there are so many Presbyterian lawyers and judges.) By contrast, traditions that emphasize radical discipleship sometimes have shunned government service, courts of law, and the military.

The Reformed Christian sub-tradition also tends to combine a stress on scripture with openness to God’s truth wherever it may be found. It gives serious attention to the Bible, combined with serious attention to and respect for work in philosophy, the arts and sciences. The point is worth an extended quote from John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Whenever we come upon these matters [excellent knowledge of arts and sciences] in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its

wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. . . .

What then? Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration.¹

(Now you know one reason why Presbyterians have tended to emphasize education as well as to appreciate modern sciences and scholarship.)

My main point here is simply this: When combined with the social and cultural contexts of Western Europe and North America from the 16th century to the present, these emphases – a worldly impetus toward faithful participation and openness to God’s truth wherever it may be found – have tended to yield a *Presbyterian heritage as engaging modernity*.² They have yielded a heritage of intentionally encountering, making use of, and participating in modern sciences, inquiries, and institutions – from the universities to business

corporations to government. (Recall that, finally, even fundamentalism may be understood as a response to modernism and that, in its Presbyterian guise, fundamental-leaning conservatism is hardly anti-intellectual.)³

The Current Cultural Context of the PC(USA)

American culture is dynamic and diverse. It includes shopping malls and symphonies, government bureaucracies, a *mélange* of ethnic and religious groups, competing political perspectives, mass media, Unitarians, business corporations, the “religious right,” and much more. The *current social and cultural context* of the PC(USA) is therefore quite complicated and resists easy generalizations. Still, it seems possible to identify a few important features.

The PC (USA) is located in the midst of a comparatively secular, consumerist, and pluralist society where educational opportunities for women and men are comparatively widely distributed.

- We are in the midst of the world’s leading economy, where global markets and interdependencies routinely converge, and where entrenched interests and practices often result in serious damage to natural environments.
- We find ourselves a society and culture routinely impacted by technical advances and scientific findings in medicine and in other fields.
- We live in a society and culture with a historical and present reality of racism, racial injustice, and discrimination, that suffers from distressing and persistent domestic poverty as well as mal-distributions of opportunities, and And presently it also attracts significant numbers of new immigrants, who enjoy few protections and little economic security.
- We live in the midst of the sole remaining “superpower” at a time

when it may well succumb to the classical temptation of empire to overreach, to act on the basis of narrow conceptions of its own interests and in pursuit of absolute and unilateral security. Such behavior inevitably creates and provokes enemies and so actually sows seeds of insecurity. Moreover, we live within sole remaining “superpower” at a time when a so-called “clash of civilizations” pressures religious communities and traditions to endorse partial and highly destructive causes.

- We live in a society that sometimes understands itself to be caught-up in “culture wars,” and that is characterized by media proliferation, the increasing segmenting of media and cultural markets and audiences. (Think “infotainment,” cable TV, and the news.) The center of the culture, which probably never was as solid and homogenous as some imagined, frequently doesn’t hold. It splinters.

Finally, we should note that, within this cultural context, the PC(USA) itself has endured a recent history of rather serious denominational conflicts. These often parallel and/or reflect broader American “culture wars,” and somewhat predictably, they have been especially intense at the level of the church’s national forum, the General Assembly. In any case, it seems important to point out that in recent years we Presbyterians have seldom spoken with a single voice. Ask us for a list of essential beliefs. Ask about gay ordination, gay marriage, religious pluralism, and end-of-life issues. Ask us about one war or another. We don’t agree. We argue and debate.

Some claim that, partly as a result of this contentious atmosphere, there is a developing split between our national forum, the GA, and more local and regional courts of the church. They say that “the basic business of the church” will migrate increasingly to the presbyteries. This seems possible,

although much depends not only on the vitality of the presbyteries, but also on what one presumes “the basic business of the church” to be. My own hunch is that, in the midst of a wider culture that is itself characterized by sharp disagreements, national offices and a national assembly have an unavoidable – and occasionally uncomfortable – role in addressing questions and provoking discussions about comparatively important issues and trends. On this score, one might even argue that the GA and its offices seem increasingly relevant.

Timely Challenges

If these points make sense, then it seems possible to identify a few broad and timely challenges for the PC(USA) and the vibrancy of its social and moral witness in our current era of global engagement. First, in the face of modern sciences, technologies, social systems, and economies, we need to revitalize *theology of culture*. We need to interpret important attitudes, such as American individualism and emphases on self-help, as well as the functions of important contemporary institutions, such as the family, business corporations, the IMF, and the university. This remains a major task in our own context, where we too often focus on ideals and abstract commitments, without directly relating them with the nuts and bolts of contemporary life. It may also constitute a distinctive contribution to the wider Christian movement in today’s world. It is true, of course, that other churches and sub-traditions will engage modernity differently than we do. By and large, however, they *will* engage modernity, its sciences, technologies, social systems, and economies. (In fact, most of them will simply have no choice.) So, perhaps some of these churches will be informed, whether in a positive manner, a cautionary one, or both, by the ways in which we engage and interpret

modernity. Perhaps we can cast up some possibilities that, when modified, others will find serviceable or even helpful.

Second, from our location within the world’s sole remaining superpower, an especially pressing need is to understand theologically the modern nation-state as well as the current international environment. We need to engage questions such as these: What are the legitimate interests and responsibilities of the sole remaining superpower in a multilateral world, say with respect to trade, terrorism, humanitarian interventions, and nuclear proliferation? Or, again, what are the classic temptations of empires?⁴

Third, the following question arises. How can we frame a faithful witness theologically at a time when the activities of so many persons and groups seriously degrade natural environments? How can we affirm the worth of human beings when a “clash of civilizations” pressures religious communities to endorse partial causes that deny the worth of those who do not belong to one’s own group, be they Americans or Sunnis or Christians or what-have-you? How can we frame a faithful witness in an age of global warming, terrorism, and torture? A possible answer, I think, is what may be called “theistic humanism.” In my judgment, this is a stance that does two related things. First, its *theocentric* emphasis on the divine governance *displaces* humans from the center of things so that our needs, wants, desires, and interests are not the only relevant standards of value, and so that we are encouraged not to reduce the value of natural environments or other creatures only to their worth for us. Next, this same emphasis “*re-replaces*” humans into the wider natural and historical ecology and context of God’s reign in which they have a place and a time as well as (non-negotiable) worth in

relation to God.⁵ It insists that communities and governments do not bestow worth upon humans; instead, communities and governments are called to recognize the worth that humans always already have in relation to God and as distinctive participants in God's world.

This brings us to a final question that, given its recent tensions, the PC(USA) simply must address. How can a church whose heritage is *engaging modernity*, and that finds itself beset by conflicts and debates, make a faithful witness? A part of the answer, I suspect, lies in remembering two things.

First, the PC(USA)'s Protestant and Reformed way of being church very often means *not* being able to constrain complete agreement. (This is, after all, a tradition that took root in the *rejection* of a hierarchical and infallibly authoritative teaching office of the church, and which must always regard its own statements as both fallible and subject to criticism and correction.)

Second, when combined with the heritage of engaging modernity, this same way of being church often entertains questions and debates that some other Christian groups don't address. It generates various and sometimes conflicting interpretations and readings of contemporary realities, as well as of traditional texts, doctrines, and ideas. Now, in our current global and American circumstances, one role for such a church, even in the midst of its own debates and disagreements, is to furnish *alternative readings*. Specifically, it may furnish alternatives to the highly traditionalist and fundamentalist readings of both the present world and Christian texts that too many contemporary persons, communities, and cultures seem in danger of mistaking for the *only* ways in which Christians

may read and interpret these things.⁶

In any case, I believe that a church such as ours should offer theological interpretations of its particular modern culture, as well as of the responsibilities and temptations of the sole remaining superpower. It should articulate and embody a genuinely theistic humanism, and it should generate alternative readings of both the world and Christian tradition. If it does these things, then its social and moral witness can remain both faithful and vibrant in an age of global engagement.

Notes

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Edited by John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 2.2.15 (pp. 273-4).

² In an important article, Edward W. Farley argued that the Presbyterian heritage is "critical modernism" that entails "openness to various discoveries, sciences, and criteria that have arisen with modernity and to the task of making use of these in the interpretation and understanding of the Christian gospel." See "The Presbyterian Heritage as Modernism," *The Presbyterian Predicament: Six Perspectives*, Edited by Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), p. 53. I am very favorably inclined toward Farley's point, although by "engaging modernity" I mean to point to a stance that goes beyond an appreciation for new knowledge and criteria to include an intentional and participatory encounter with certain institutions. See below.

³ See, for example, J. Gresham Machen's books *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) and *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

⁴ Along these lines, let me recommend Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military*

(Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).

⁵ I have learned a great deal from William Schweiker's exploration of "theological humanism" in *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In the Time of Many Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 199-219. On the displacing and re-placing aspects of my understanding of "theistic humanism," see Douglas F. Ottati, "Which Way Is Up? An Experiment in Christian Theology and Recent Cosmology," *Interpretation* (October 2005): 370-381.

⁶ Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) argues that secularists who pay attention to the Bible can furnish alternative readings of the scriptures. However, he does not have a strong appreciation for how more liberal and Reformed Christian believers and their communities might also contribute to a similar but broader effort.

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- Spring 2006, with a survey of issues that were going to the General Assembly
- Spring 2005, with the Accra statement on "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth"
- and many more ... just ask!



Comfort and challenge “for the living of these days”

A report from the Riverside convocation on preaching

by John Harris,
Witherspoon’s Membership Coordinator

Attending the 5th Fosdick Ecumenical

Convocation on Preaching, hosted by New York’s Riverside Church on October 23-26, was like attending a progressive pep rally. It was built around theme, **“For the Living of These Days,”** echoing the great hymn written by Riverside’s founding minister, Harry Emerson Fosdick.

An outstanding parade of preachers including Gardner Taylor, Sam wells, Cornel West, Otis Moss III, Barbara Brown Taylor, Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., and James A Forbes, Jr. as well as presenters including Joan Brown Campbell, Barbara Lundblad, Diana Butler Bass, Minerva Carcaño, Tony Compolo, Barbara Harris, Brian McLaren, Donna Schaper and Hal Taussig both comforted and challenged us.

They challenged progressive Christians to reclaim our religious language and to re-renter the market place of ideas, including the political sphere. They challenged progressives to root our social justice activism within historic Christian disciplines such as prayer, retreat, and spiritual direction. They challenged us to be more open to the Holy Spirit and therefore open to personal as well as civil and church transformation.

They also pointed out that some progressive congregations are growing and that there are numerous un-churched in our society who are not

attracted to – or are even fed up with – the fundamentalist and conservative theology and politics of the religious right. Many of them are looking for open hearted, open minded, inclusive progressive Christian communities to feed their spiritual and intellectual hunger and within which to find authentic community.

Just one block from “The God Box” of 475 Riverside Drive and across the street from Union Seminary, the Riverside Church could well have tempted convocation participants to lament the good old days when UPCUSA leaders like Eugene Carson Blake spoke truth to power and power listened, when thinkers like Reinhold Niebuhr helped shape the moral and ethical compass of our nation, and when pulpites like Harry Emerson Fosdick and William Sloan Coffin inspired hundreds if not thousands by their preaching. Such was not the case, however.

As most of the preachers and presenters made clear, the main-line is now the side-line, a faithful remnant with a truth and a story to share and to tell. Like salt that that has not lost its flavor and like leaven in a batch of dough, the progressive Church can and must still make its presence known.

Any Witherspooner present would have resonated with some of the words and phrases that rolled off the lips of the leaders. More than once we heard “whole Gospel,” “prophetic

voice,” “inclusive,” and “empire.” Hearing such echoes of the Witherspoon Society Mission Statement and our many concerns convinced me that I was among like-minded brothers and sisters in Christ, even though the convocation was ecumenical. The environment and its attendant spiritual energy suggested that I might share more in common with my progressive UCC, ABC and non-denominational Evangelical brothers and sisters than I do with conservatives in my own denomination. Energized by the experience, I came home feeling spiritually renewed and empowered, knowing that I was not alone.

While other Witherspooners may well have been present, at least two former Witherspoon officers (Kent Winters-Hazelton and Victoria L. Moss) and one current officer, John E. Harris, attended the convocation.



Witherspooners John Harris, Vicki Moss, and Kent Winters-Hazelton
(Photos by John Harris)

In a world of uncertainty, there's a clear call to listen and to act

Book review:

***The Skeptical Passionate Christian*, by Michael Duffy**

reviewed by Kenneth Smith, former president of the Witherspoon Society

Reading *The Skeptical Passionate Christian* by Michael Duffy (WJK, 2006) was a surprising treat for this retired actuary. His personal story and willingness to face the uncertainty that surrounds all statements of faith was appealing to me. In reflecting on conversations with those with whom we disagree, even when no one changes their position, he writes "There are good reasons to have respectful, informed, honest and vigorous conversations. These reasons include deepened self understanding, improved relationships with one another, and a better life for all of us as we discover those convictions upon which we can best rest our lives." What an endorsement for the process used by the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church!

The major themes are our uncertainty about what God is doing in this world, and about God's call to us specifically. The whole book is about examining God's call to us in the midst of this uncertainty. Duffy provides "tools for living faithfully in an uncertain world," the subtitle of his book. He observes, along with Spong, Borg and others, "that many who call themselves Christians are trying to find new ways to understand their faith in the midst of old ways that are no longer working for them."

Any faith is "a human way of making sense of and living in the world." This faith must function in our uncertain world, helping us to make deci-

sions about the direction of our lives and responding to our "hunger for the good life." Given this introduction, it is not surprising that Duffy defines Christian Faith in a unique, but I believe useful, way: "Christian faith is reliance upon a set of articulable but frequently unarticulated and unconscious assumptions or convictions that, taken together, demonstrate the centrality of Jesus to a person's relationship with God and provide her or him with resources to live well in an uncertain world."

The task of Christian theology is to examine these faith assumptions and convictions. This examination looks at "the resources for living well that they provide and the actions that flow from them and from reliance upon them." Duffy believes that a strong Christian faith "is most possible through a rigorous theological exploration of our deepest convictions." However, he acknowledges that there are Christians who feel just the opposite. (I suspect that most of us reading *Network News* are fans of rigorous theological exploration.)

The meat of this book is a detailed process for this rigorous theological exploration, with a particular emphasis on question of vocation. Although certainly applicable to the undergraduates whom Duffy teaches on a regular basis, "the conviction that God calls each one of us to accept certain specifiable roles or sets of responsibilities" applies to all of us. The process is different for me

now as a retiree than when I was in my 20s, but I am convinced that God still has a role for me to play. This book provides a lot of tools for looking at these questions in a systematic way.

In his last chapter, Duffy "reminds us of the importance of community for the Christian life." This is "the context within which theology and discernment must be done, for they train us in the lifelong practices that make discernment and faithful living possible." This is a very important point, and I wish Duffy had made it earlier rather than almost as an afterthought. However when he gets there, he writes that "committing to be an active part of a community that takes seriously the practice of listening for and living out God's demands will enable you to practice Christian life more comprehensively than perhaps any other single commitment that you can make." I hope those of us in The Witherspoon Society will "seek a community that makes a priority out of hearing these demands and supporting one another in the process of accepting and acting on them."

Are you overdue?

You can find the expiration date of your membership by looking at the top right corner of the mailing label on this issue.

We invite you to send in your renewal now, using the return envelope in the center of this newsletter, or going on-line at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/membership_form.htm, using your credit card through PayPal.

Questions? Contact our Membership Coordinator, John Harris. (See page page 31.)

Witherspoon News

“Chicago is ... Our Kind of Town”

Revisiting the Society’s Fall 2006 board meeting in Chicago

by Jake Young, co-moderator of the Witherspoon Society

There’s a great history of social justice ministries in this broad-shouldered Midwest city (e.g. Chicago Christian Industrial League and Rainbow/PUSH Coalition). But I suppose we gathered here primarily because it is a convenient central hub for our far-flung board members.

We gathered at McCormick Seminary in Chicago, September 13-16. We came from east and west, north¹ and south to review the Witherspoon Society’s recent journey and plan our steps going forward together as we continue to pursue justice from our home in the PC(USA).

Before the formal business meeting began, we welcomed four special guests to our gathering. On Wednesday evening, Eunice and Dick Poethig joined us. The Poethigs live near McCormick in Hyde Park and have been active members of the Society since its beginnings over 30 years ago! Their experience with Witherspoon, and as leaders more broadly in the Presbyterian Church, provided a valuable orientation as we prepared to work together.

Later the same evening, new board member Bill Dummer noted his interest in Ghana. Providentially, a Ghanaian theologian and church leader,

Mercy Oduyoye, was staying on the same floor of the McCormick building in which we were housed! She and her travel companion, June Rogers (another longstanding Witherspooner), joined us. They enlightened us about the justice work being undertaken in Africa by Mercy and other women of faith. We also learned about the Ghana Women’s Project and the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture. These organizations build partnerships between Americans and Africans and pursue theological education opportunities for African women as well as theological curricula development inclusive of women’s perspectives.

For the next two days, we attacked our agenda – in a nonviolent way. There were financial reports, membership reports, communications strategy summaries, performance reviews, and other similar business items too titillating to mention here.

The overall tone of the meeting was very upbeat and encouraging. I’m not saying there were no episodes of sardonic critical reflection by the group. There were. But that’s a staple of progressive theology, a sure sign of right assessment (if not right orthodoxy), if you will.

What was upbeat and encouraging

was the collegiality and commitment to problem-solving by all members of the board. The engagement by new members was especially encouraging. In fact, this was the first board meeting for five present. I would like to attribute this atmosphere to the superlative leadership of the meeting, but then, Trina Zelle is too modest for such an attribution.

In addition to all those reports and reviews, we undertook an exciting new project we are calling the Global Engagement Initiative (GEI for short). This grows out of our ongoing collaboration with Worldwide Ministries Division, as well as a recognition that, in mission, we may find unity as a church. The board committed to supporting a long-term mission worker focusing on social and economic justice. We are proud to announce our support of Shannon O’Donnell who will be working in Jerusalem at the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. [For more on O’Donnell and Sabeel, see pp. 6 ff.]

We also set important dates for 2007, which I hope you will mark on your calendar. Our “GA Off-Year” Conference will be held in Louisville, September 16-19. As in 2005, we will feature ongoing Presbyterian global outreach efforts for justice and peace, especially the work of Young Adult Volunteers and the powerful stories of transformation they encounter which enrich all of us. The location chosen is also a restatement of the Society’s continued support of the important na-

tional programs and talented staff of our church. (See next column for details.)

The week of July 30-August 5, 2007, will feature the ninth year of our Ghost Ranch Seminar in collaboration with Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF) and Presbyterians Restoring Creation (PRC). Only this year everything has changed! Thanks to record participation in 2006, as well as some personnel changes in the sponsoring organizations (can you say, "Ufford-Chase"?), we are expanding the program to include multiple seminars and participation by the denomination's Peacemaking Program. Many thanks to Jane Hanna, former President of Witherspoon, for coordinating this seminar since it began. (See pp. 29-30.)

In other news, keep on the lookout for:

- a new ecumenical Social Creed, crafted in part by Witherspoon members, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1908 Social Creed (pp 20-21);
- our statement in response to the 217th General Assembly's actions taken regarding the Theological Task Force's report and the disturbing aftershocks coming from various parts of the denomination retaliating against the GA's decisions (p. 15); and
- your membership renewal letter!

Respectfully submitted,
Jake Young

¹ Now that Doug King has relocated from Minnesota to Georgia, the "north of Chicago" claim was in danger of becoming somewhat tenuous. Fortunately, new board member Bill Dummer hails from Milwaukee these days. Thank you, Bill! (Now throw another log on the fire.)

We're planning another national conference – September 16 - 19, 2007 in Louisville, KY



We will focus on the question:

**When our "neighborhood" is the globe,
how shall we be good neighbors?**

Some of the items we plan to include:

- **How do we listen to our neighbors, locally and globally?**
- **What are they telling us?**
- **And how might we respond?**
- What can we learn from the Accra statement of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, on "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth"? (See *Network News* for Spring 2005, pp. 9-11, or go to http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/doc-181-1.pdf)
- Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick, who was deeply involved in the process of formulating that statement, plans to spend some time with us reflecting on the significance of the document for us in the U.S.
- And what can we learn from the "Social Creed" currently being drafted by the National Council of Churches?
- How shall we deepen and strengthen our commitment to share in the PC(USA)'s engagement in mission, globally and locally?

Save the dates!

We'll have more information in the next issue of *Network News*, and even sooner at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/about_us/news_of_the_society.htm

We welcome your comments, essays, news and announcements
for the next issue of *Network News*.

The deadline for submissions is

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Please let us hear from you!

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A feast for minds and spirits ...

A WEEK FOR PEACE, GLOBAL JUSTICE AND CREATION

Ghost Ranch, July 30-August 5, 2007

This coming summer the Witherspoon Society is joining with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Presbyterians for Restoring Creation and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, along with Ghost Ranch, to provide Presbyterians with a rich selection of leaders and topics centering on just what the title says: peace, global justice, and the creation.

The groups collaborating for this week together share concern for how we, among the privileged of the earth, can live as Jesus taught, while so much of the world suffers extreme poverty, disease, homelessness, violence and exploitation of God's good earth. Evening sessions will be in plenary worship and time with Argentine pastor Robert Hugh Jordan, who has served Presbyterian and Reformed churches in Buenos Aires. Reverend Jordan has been active in ecumenical work since his teens in the Latin American Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and most recently as a member of the Executive Committee and Moderator of the Communication Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. His time with us will focus on the WARC statement, "Accra Confession on Economic Justice," which he helped draft in Accra, Ghana, in 2004. Saturday evening we'll gather to remember those who perished when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to renew our commitment to work for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Morning sessions are planned as skills workshops led by the sponsoring Presbyterian justice, peace and environmental groups. Indicate your choice from the following on the registration form.

Advocating for Justice and Peace

How we frame the call for peace and justice matters. Behind words like "terrorism," "globalization," and even "development" lay different visions of community and social order. Many Christians share some distinctive visions of human purpose and, within the PC(USA), tested policies for advancing social witness concerns. We will look at strategies such as a new "social creed" for achieving gains for justice and peace in church and society.

Leader: Chris Iosso, Coordinator of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy for the PC(USA), former Issues Analyst for The Witherspoon Society and pastor in New York State.

Earth-honoring Faith

What if we did our theology as if creation mattered? What if creation care determined our daily habits and practices? What if all issues (water, wealth and poverty, peace, e.g.) were all informed by Earth-honoring worship? What can we learn from faith communities of eco-justice ministry? This triad—theology, issues, worship, all in community—will create the week together.

Leaders: Larry Rasmussen, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus, Union Theological Seminary and author of *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, and PRC member John Preston, author of *Wrestling Until the Dawn: The Fight for Biblical Justice in a Postmodern World*.

The Israel/Palestine Conflict

This unresolved tragedy is not only globally divisive but also denominationally as faith communities debate divestment, Christian Zionism, anti-Semitism, settlements, occupation and terrorism. Participants will be helped to sort out the issues that dominate headlines and explore avenues of faithful action.

Leaders: Marthame and Elizabeth Sanders, PCUSA missionaries for three years in the Northern West Bank working in ecumenical support of local Christian Ministries. Information about them and their documentary film series, "Salt of the Earth: Palestine Christians in the Northern West Bank," can be found at www.saltfilms.net.

Speaking Truth to the Powerful and the Not so Powerful

This workshop offers an opportunity to learn how to talk about tough and controversial issues with neighbors, family, in our churches and to halls of power. The new and growing faith-based movement against torture has developed skills, both practical and spiritual, for building solidarity across theological and political fault lines. Insights will be drawn from history, law and social movement theory, scripture, prayer, theology and ethics for the skills, insight and strategies necessary for work on issues of torture and violence.

Leader: Carol Wickersham, PCUSA pastor, a coordinator of the NO2Torture movement advocating humane treatment of detainees.



Peacemaking 401

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship has for more than 60 years supported the promotion of nonviolent alternatives to war. This experience will facilitate an active search for genuine security in an age of violence. The week will help participants discern their own calling to risk-taking through peace vigils, direct actions, faith-based civil disobedience, and non-violent intervention such as accompaniment in defense of human and ecological rights.

Leaders: Rick Ufford-Chase, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Moderator of the 216th General Assembly, and PPF members.

Building a Culture of Peace: Exploring the Terrain and Practice of Reconciliation

Peacemaking, building community, animating interfaith and ecumenical relationships are among the various paths of discipleship we can follow to respond to our call to be reconciling agents in our world. In this workshop we will explore how these paths are interrelated, and ways to help people become involved in them. Along with Bible study and discussion of the theological grounding for this work, we will look at specific techniques and approaches, such as conflict transformation, analysis of power dynamics, constructive mapping of one's situation to address a problem, and how to help ourselves and others discern our calling in relation to the gospel's call.

Leaders: Sara Lisherness, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program; Jay Rock, Interfaith Relations Office, PC(USA).

Discover the Vision, Discover the World: The Presbyterian Church and the United Nations

Did you know the Presbyterian Church has an office at the United Nations? Do you know what that office does? In this workshop, we will explore the basic history of the UN and the Presbyterian Church's part in this history. We will look at the work of the UN and how the Presbyterian United Nations Office bears witness to Jesus Christ by equipping Presbyterians for discipleship in the global arena and advocating the concerns of Presbyterian General Assemblies to the UN.

Leader: Joel Hanisek, Presbyterian Representative to the UN.

The Journey Continues: Peacemaking as a Life-Long Commitment

Do you want to reenergize your peacemaking ministry? Do you want to build the peacemaking ministry of your congregation? For individuals and congregations, the work of peacemaking is more than just a one-time activity; it is a life long journey following the nonviolent Jesus. Through Bible study, personal reflection and group interaction, participants on all stages of the peacemaking journey will explore ways to sustain our personal commitments to peacemaking and to nurture peacemaking ministries in our congregations.

Leader: Mark Koenig, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

Registration and other fees have not yet been set. See the Ghost Ranch catalogue when it is published, or go to <http://www.ghostranch.org/catalog/index.php> for the latest information as soon as it becomes available.

Want to save money?

Rick Ufford-Chase is creating a camping community for those wishing to reduce housing and meal expenses. It will include campfire time, morning devotions and shared meals in the campground. Contact rickuffordchase@gmail.com or 520-780-6928 if you wish the shared meal rather than dining room meals. A few tents, sleeping bags and pads are available if needed.

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The
Next
Network
News

Our first issue of 2007 will be a little more prompt than this one, we hope. Your editor's move from Minnesota to Georgia has kept things in a bit of a muddle, so putting *Network News* together has just been slow.

We expect that our next issue will bring you more news of our new "Global Engagement Initiative," plus information on ongoing issues within the PC(USA), efforts for peace and justice around the world ... and much more. We welcome your contributions!

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Louisville conference on global mission and justice, September 16-19

Network News

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