



WALLS

between Israel
and Palestine
between nations
between people

Is the Spirit
calling us
to tear down
those walls?



This special pre-Assembly issue of *Network News* is being sent to all General Assembly commissioners as a gift from the Witherspoon Society.

Inside this issue you'll find **analysis and commentary** on some of the vital matters that will be coming before the Assembly, along with **information about events** that will be sponsored by Witherspoon and other groups, plus news of other events, book reviews, and much more.

We hope you'll find helpful reflections here and that you'll stop by our booth and get acquainted with us in Birmingham.

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The President's Corner

Sabbath Economics

by Ken Smith

I know, I know, I already have a book review in this issue of *Network News*. However, I cannot recall reading two books back to back that issued such compelling calls to social justice as *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* by Jack Rogers (see p. 17) and *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* by Ched Myers. (Go to www.bcm-net.org and click on "resources" for ordering information.) Ched Myers is a theologian and popular educator based in Los Angeles, CA. He works in the field of nonviolent activism for social justice, church renewal and radical discipleship. He has a degree in New Testament from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA.

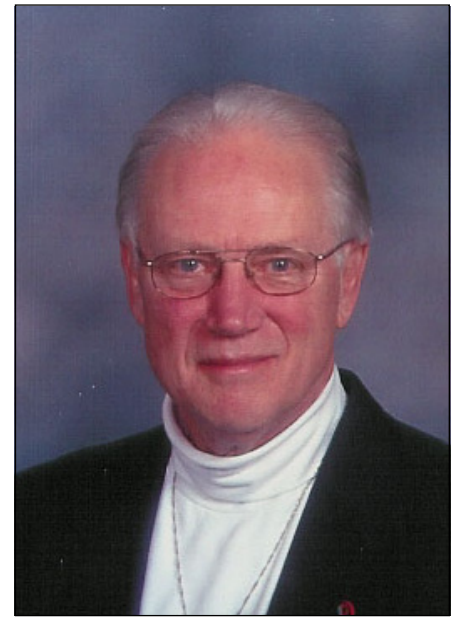
"We read the gospel as if we had no money and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the Gospel." This quote from Jesuit theologian John Haughey is how Ched begins his book and is really his reason for writing it. The book presents the tradition of what Ched calls Sabbath economics, which can be summarized in three axioms:

- 1) the world as created by God is abundant with enough for everyone – provided that human communities restrain their appetites and live within limits;
- 2) disparities in wealth and power are not "natural" but the result of human sin, and must be mitigated within the community of faith through the regular practice of redistribution;
- 3) the prophetic message calls

people to the practice of such redistribution, and is thus characterized as "good news" to the poor.

Sabbath economics "has been marginalized by biblical interpreters [who are] skeptical of the Jubilee tradition as irrelevant, unrealistic or threatening; they have not found evidence for its practice in either Testament because they have not been looking for it." In response to this marginalization, this book presents "a brief [66 pages] and popular survey and summary of the biblical vision of Sabbath economics." Here are a couple of examples.

Ched is at his best when he is doing New Testament Bible study, as he does with the story of the rich man in Mark 10:17-31 and the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30). In response to the rich man's question – "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" – "Jesus neither opens his arms in universal enfranchisement, as in the tradition of modern liberal theology, nor does he demand proper belief, as conservative theology dictates. Instead Jesus challenges him, straightforwardly, to redis-



Ken Smith

tribute his assets to the poor." As rich men and women, we need to change our concern about eternal life to Jesus' concern about the Kingdom of God; "simply that social condition *in which there are no rich and poor*. By definition, then, the rich cannot enter – not, that is, with their wealth intact." "This is the answer to the rich man's question; for the privileged, reparation – the concrete practice of restoring to the poor what is theirs by rights of community justice – is their only way in."

Ched is even further from mainstream interpretation when he takes on the "notorious" parable of the talents. While the traditional reading of this is as a Kingdom parable with the Master as a figure for God, Ched rejects this reading as "exactly backwards." "The original audience of this story

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would not have had to allegorize it to make sense of it. Its portrait of a great household – the closest thing in antiquity to the modern corporation – was all too recognizable.” The amount of money, on the other hand, was not recognizable at all; a talent was a silver “coin” weighing over 60 pounds, with a value 6,000 times an average subsistence daily wage. If we take this understanding seriously, we begin to see the third slave not as failing to use his talent but rather as speaking truth to power about the injustice in the economic system.

I invite you to read this book and never think about your money in the same way again.



**Progressive
Presbyterians
establish shared web site
for GA**

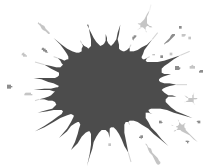
A number of progressive organizations related to the PC(USA) are jointly putting their information and commentary on General Assembly business on a web site, hosted by the Witherspoon Society. We are honored to be invited to play this role.

The site is already up and running, at
www.justpresbys.org

Some material is already posted there, and more will be added frequently. There will be daily updates during the Assembly as well.

We hope you'll find it helpful!

Stop in any time, at
www.justpresbys.org



The Editor's Spot

Are we ready to be a post-Easter church?

by Doug King

I'm writing this just a few days after Easter. Through the week before that I became deeply aware of the way Jesus' death, and our own, puts things in perspective. And then came the surprise of Easter – so familiar, but always so new – that death isn't the end after all.

As we move toward our church's General Assembly, those familiar themes of death and new life and perpetual surprise keep rising to the top of my awareness, leading me to affirm three things in these challenging days – challenging for our church, for our nation and the world, and for many of us personally as well.

First, this season reminds us that after all our efforts to protect ourselves from the inevitable threat of death, we are now free to give up that struggle. We can stop trying to control the people around us, to control the church as if it were our own property, to control the world as America's proper sphere of dominion – all in a vain effort to keep death at bay. All those struggles that hurt us so deeply in our own lives, in our families, in our church and our world – we can just take a deep breath and let them go. Our Assembly and our life as a church will be a lot healthier if we can remember that core assurance of our faith.

But more than that, Jesus' victory over death assures us again and again that it's not our job to overcome our “enemies” – be they people with whom we disagree, or “terrorists,” or death itself with the final loss of control and of loving connections that it seems to bring. We can breathe, confident that when finally our breathing ceases, God's breath of life will still be there for us, in us.

And finally this season of Easter, and the great day of Pentecost which we will celebrate not long before our Assembly, remind us that whatever else we may expect in the days to come, God invites us to be ready for surprises. We will gather in Birmingham each with our own agendas, our own hopes and fears and distrust of others. If we have learned anything over the past few years, we know there is reason enough for anxiety and distrust. Many of us have given much of our time and talents to this church for which we care so deeply. And whether we occupy the left and or the right or the big “broad middle” of this church, we are not ready to give away our place in the pew or at the table.

But we might also remember that the church is not “ours” to define, to control, to defend. It is “ours” only as stewards, in the same way the earth is “ours” – to care for, to nurture, to enjoy, but not to control.

So let's gather in Birmingham to strive for those convictions and visions and actions that we believe are needed for us and for our church. But let's strive with love, and always, always be ready to be surprised.

And maybe – just maybe – we will, like the Christians at that Pentecost gathering, be surprised by an outpouring of gifts – gifts of understanding one another, gifts of healing, gifts of courage and of love – that will equip our church to reach out to the world with renewed strength, offering our desperately needed gifts of passionate service for peace and justice.



Looking toward the 217th General Assembly

June 15 - 22, 2006
Birmingham, Alabama

Witherspoon Society GA Events

Wednesday, June 14, 1:00 to 4:00 pm
Semper Reformanda Pre-GA Conversation
(sponsored by the Witherspoon Society)

Speaker: Dr. Mark Lewis Taylor, Professor of Theology and Culture, Princeton Theological Seminary

This conversation will look at the United States as empire. This will be addressed in Dr. Taylor's remarks and in looking at the document, "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth," adopted by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana in 2004. Dr Taylor is author of the recent book, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and American Empire*.

First Presbyterian Church, 2100 4th Avenue North, about 5 blocks from the Convention Center.

Ticket price: \$15.00

Wednesday, June 14, 8:30 to 10:30 pm (immediately following Covenant Network dinner)
Witherspoon GA Issues Briefing

Speaker: Eugene Teselle, Witherspoon Society Issues Analyst, and Friends.

This regular Witherspoon Society event for commissioners and others provides a progressive look at the Assembly and the issues, ideas on how to be an effective participant, and a chance to meet other progressives.

To be announced

Ticket price: \$15.00

Saturday, June 17, 9:00 pm to 1:00 am
Witherspoon Party and Dance

Time for a break! This is a great chance to relax and enjoy great music, dancing and conversation and also a good time to meet others at the Assembly.

Sheraton Ballroom XII

Ticket price: \$20.00

Sunday, June 18, 12:30 to 2:30 pm
Witherspoon Society Awards Luncheon

Speaker: Rev. Eugenia A. Gamble, Writer in Residence, Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley

Rev. Gamble's featured address is entitled "Embodying Love." (See page 5.) The Andrew Murray Award will be presented to Anne Barstow and Tom Driver for their courageous accompaniment of people in Colombia, Haiti, and Central America. (See pp. 24-25 for expressions of some of their concerns.) The Whole Gospel Congregation Award will go to Birmingham's First Presbyterian Church. The Witherspoon business meeting will follow the luncheon. (See page 38.)

Sheraton Ballroom I

Ticket price: \$35.00

Witherspoon Luncheon speaker:

The Rev. Eugenia A. Gamble, on “Embodying Love”



Rev. Eugenia Gamble

We first invited the Rev. Eugenia Gamble as our major speaker for the Witherspoon Luncheon at General Assembly, because we had heard so much about her exciting and creative ministry from 1996 to 2005 as Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, where the Assembly will be convening.

While in Birmingham she provided leadership in the development and implementation of the vision of First Light, Inc., a center for homeless women and children. First Light provides emergency shelter, long term shelter for the disabled homeless, day programming, and on site psychiatric services. It was just

such work that earned her the Outstanding Woman of the Year award for 2004, presented by the Women’s Center of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

But there is much more in her experience and varieties of ministry that promises an interesting and challenging luncheon address for all of us, as she talks of ways the church does indeed “embody love.”

Since her ordination in 1984, she has served congregations in Colorado, as Staff Associate for Leader Development of Women under the General Assembly Mission Council, and Associate Executive Presbyter for the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley, before being called by the Birmingham congregation. Along the way she has participated in various regional and national committees, including the Committee of 15 to draft “A Brief Statement of Faith.”

She has been the keynote speaker at numerous conferences, schools and colleges, presbyteries and synods, including Montreat Conference Center, Mo-Ranch Conference Center, Presbyterian Women national meetings, Epworth by the Sea Conference Center, and the dedication of the Third World Church Leaders Center in Seoul, Korea. She has also been the featured preacher on the Protestant Hour international radio broadcast, and the “30 Good Minutes” television broadcast.

She doesn’t just talk, though. She writes, having authored a number of study and worship resources for women, including *Glimpses of Home: Images of the Realm of God in Scripture*, the annual Bible Study for Presbyterian Women, which in 1995 won the Associated Church Press First Place Award for Excellence, for Bible Study.

William Sloane Coffin on the meaning of Easter

Christianity is a religion of resurrection, [but] it is a common and tragic mistake to view Easter in too narrow, too individualistic a light. Paul makes it abundantly clear that Easter is concerned essentially not with one man’s escape from the grave, but with a cosmic victory of seemingly powerless love over loveless power. The lamp of the resurrection doesn’t swing over some narrow, empty grave, but rather over the thick darkness covering the whole earth.

“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.

Issues coming to the 217th General Assembly

A survey from a progressive perspective

by Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Society Issues Analyst

Report on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church

In 2001 the General Assembly created the Theological Task Force (TTF) on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church (PUP), directing it to discuss issues of “Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power” and report annually to the presbyteries and to the General Assembly. Those reports have been made, and the final report was issued in two parts, one on July 19 and another, including the much-awaited recommendations, on August 25.

Exhortations to Mutuality and Discernment

The document begins, continues, and ends with exhortations to mutual “discernment” as Presbyterians conduct their business and respond to each other’s actions.

This reflects what happened in the deliberations of the twenty-member TTF. They learned to love and respect each other despite their differences; yet no one’s mind was changed concerning core convictions, especially the ordination of gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender members of our church.

They worked out a statement that all of them could agree to, without any dissenting votes or minority report. The conservatives on the Task Force, who include Jack Haberer, the new editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook*, can thus be characterized as “*inclusive conservatives*,” in contrast to the “*exclusive conservatives*” whose united voice is the Presbyterian Coalition.

In Part V, the conclusion of the report, the TTF’s Recommendation 2 urges governing bodies, congregations, and other groups of Presbyterians to follow the example of the TTF and engage in a process of “intensive discernment.” This has already been done in a few presbyteries, responding early to the TTF’s report.

Recommendation 4 urges all who plan and moderate meetings of governing bodies to “explore the use of alternative forms of discernment and decision-making as a complement to parliamentary procedure, especially in dealing with po-

tentially divisive issues” (lines 1150-54).

All this is to the good. But most people in the church were waiting for the “bottom line” — how the TTF dealt with the issues for which it was created.

What the Report Does

The big surprise is that the TTF focuses not on the controversial G-6.0106b, which was added to the Book of Order in

All those abbreviations!

People are often puzzled by the abbreviations used in this article, and in the discussions in committees and on the floor of the General Assembly. Here are the ones you are most likely to hear:

- GA General Assembly
- PJC Permanent Judicial Commission
- TTF Theological Task Force
- PUP Peace, Unity, and Purity
- AI Authoritative interpretation of the Constitution by the General Assembly
- G-6 Chapter 6 of the Form of Government, part of the Book of Order
- 6b G-6.0106b, the amendment which was sent to the presbyteries as Amendment B and was added to the Form of Government in 1997, whose purpose was to prohibit ordination of gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender members
- 8 G-6.0108, a passage that has been in the Form of Government since reunion in 1983, which affirms freedom of conscience under the Word of God and authorizes governing bodies to judge whether any “departure” from the provisions of the Constitution concerns the “essentials” of Reformed faith and polity

1996-97, but on G-6.0108, which has been there since reunion in 1983. This says that

- ordained officers “shall adhere to the *essentials* of the Reformed faith and polity”;
- *freedom of conscience* in the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained as long as there is not “serious departure” from these standards; and
- the judgment whether a person has departed from the “essentials,” and how seriously, rests with the governing body.

In Recommendation 5, the TTF calls on the 2006 General Assembly to adopt an authoritative interpretation (“AI” for short) of G-6.0108b, stating that

- the standards for ordination and installation are set forth in the Constitution;
- governing bodies have the responsibility to apply these standards;
- this includes the task of determining whether a candidate has “departed” from the scriptural and constitutional standards and whether any such departure amounts to a failure to adhere to the “essentials” of the Reformed faith and polity;
- even when a governing body has acted responsibly, its decision is always subject to review by a higher body; but
- all parties should “endeavor to outdo one another” in honoring each others’ decisions.

Throughout the TTF report there is a constant balancing of two seemingly contradictory perspectives.

Sometimes there is “*hold the line*” language, to the effect that standards are established by the whole church; that local governing bodies “cannot set their own standards or set aside the church’s standards”; and thus that “local option” is not an accurate way of characterizing their recommendation.

At the same time there is *flexibility*, since any examination involves determining, “on a *case-by-case* basis,” whether the person adheres to the “essential and necessary articles” and, if there is any “departure” from them, whether it is “serious.” The report notes that the Adopting Act of 1729 gave ministers the opportunity to dissent from articles of the Westminster Confession and made ordaining bodies respon-

sible for determining whether this was an essential tenet. Neither the Adopting Act nor any subsequent action of the church has ventured to say what the essential tenets are.

American Presbyterianism’s Heritage of Flexibility

In the Church of Scotland after 1700 there was a strong impulse toward “*strict subscription*” to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Longer Catechisms. This was controversial from the start. It was intensified by the desire of some Scottish presbyteries to impose stricter standards, in effect imposing *additional confessions of faith*.

In colonial America, the first presbytery was organized in 1706 — exactly 300 years ago — and the first synod in 1717. Their makeup was already diverse, with ministers from Scotland, Ireland, and New England. In 1729 the synod approved an Adopting Act that affirmed the Westminster standards “in all the essential and necessary articles,” but permitted those seeking ordination to state their “scruples” concerning these standards and left it to the presbytery to judge whether these were within legitimate bounds, not affecting the essentials.

American Presbyterians split a number of times, then came back together. There were *agreements of reunion* between the Old Side and New Side (1758), Old School and New School (1869-70), the PCUSA with the Cumberland Presbyterians (1903-6), the PCUSA with the United Presbyterians (1958), and the UPCUSA with the PCUS (1983). *These would not have happened without the continuing spirit of the Adopting Act*. The language of G-6.0108 and the TTF’s Recommendation 5, therefore, is not something new; it is the spirit of American Presbyterianism from the very beginning.

During the 1920s the fundamentalist-modernist controversy broke out in the Presbyterian church. After several years of tension, the General Assemblies of 1926 and 1927 approved the recommendations of the Swearingen Commission, which said that any GA statement about “essentials,” such as the five fundamentals, cannot have the same au-

If you want to do some homework prior to the Assembly, several books deal with the controversy during the 1920s: Loetscher’s *The Broadening Church* (Pennsylvania, 1954), Longfield’s *The Presbyterian Controversy* (Oxford, 1991), and Weston’s *Presbyterian Pluralism* (Tennessee, 1997).

Is Predestination an “Essential” of the Reformed Faith?

For centuries, predestination was considered *an essential*, and certainly the *most distinctive* essential, of the Reformed tradition. There were several alternative ways of stating it (we do not need to go into these now!), but suggestions that human beings determine their own destiny were consistently condemned. The Cumberland Presbyterians broke away because this doctrine looked like “fatality.”

During the reunion with the majority of the Cumberland Presbyterians in 1903, several chapters were added to the Westminster Confession (C-6.183-190), along with a “Declaratory Statement” (C-6.191-193) that God wills the salvation of all and offers it to all, hindering no one. Where the Westminster Confession had spoken only of “elect infants” (C-6.066), it now declared that “all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace” (C-6.193). These were major shifts.

Today, most ministers and members of the PC(USA) probably do not affirm predestination as classically understood; they would find other ways to affirm God’s love for all human beings, their freedom to accept or reject this love, and their continuing need to rely on God for perseverance.

thority as the Constitution. No standards can be imposed beyond the Confessions and the Book of Order, and the ordaining body has the responsibility of assessing an ordinand’s statement as a whole.

Members of the TTF have emphasized the word “standards,” noting, on the one hand, that *standards are not “essentials,”* and, on the other, that *standards are not a matter of “local option.”* It is important to remember this guideline as we think about the PUP report.

In sum, the TTF acknowledges, and urges the Assembly to *acknowledge formally*, that G-6.0108 has *already* established the legitimacy of “departures” (“scruples” in the language of the Adopting Act) from adherence to the letter of the Constitution, as long as they are not violations of the “essential and necessary” features of Reformed faith, practice, and polity.

Faith, Practice, and Polity — All Are Involved Together

The TTF report speaks of *both faith and practice*, as G-6.0108 does, and as the Adopting Act already did in speaking of “*doctrine, discipline, and government.*” It notes the irony that over time (especially in recent years, we might add, with heated disputes over same-sex relations) an *imbalance* has developed, with flexibility over doctrine but requirements for strict compliance in conduct — in other words, *the Book of Order has become a more powerful, or at least a blunter, instrument than the Book of Confessions.*

The TTF was prescient when it noted this growing imbalance between flexibility in doctrine and rigidity over polity. In response to the TTF report, conservatives have sought several means of *reducing flexibility* in matters of discipline and government. These moves seem to grow out of fear that some governing bodies might ordain gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.

Three different ways of achieving *greater rigidity in polity* are being tried.

1. Pittsburgh Presbytery is sending an overture to *amend the Form of Government* by adding a new sentence to G-6.0108b, stating that any practice that is required or mandatory, labeled with the word “shall,” is to be considered “an essential of Reformed faith and polity for officers of the church.” The purpose, of course, is to counter the effect of the TTF’s Recommendation 5 if it is adopted.

2. Philadelphia Presbytery has approved an overture whose implementation would be less cumbersome. It proposed to *amend Recommendation 5 before final action by the Assembly*, adding language stating that

(a) any violation of a “direct provision” of the *Book of Order* is a bar to ordination or installation,

(b) even if no direct provision applies, any “failure to adhere to the essentials of Reformed faith and practice” is a similar bar; and

(c) no ordaining body may fail to maintain “any standard stipulated in the *Book of Order.*”

3. An overture from the Presbytery of New Covenant (Texas) asks the General Assembly to adopt an *alternative authoritative interpretation*, stating that there is a differ-

How Many “Shalls” Are There?

Passage of this amendment would have some rather curious consequences. Michael Adee, field organizer for More Light Presbyterians, did a count with the help of his computer and found that “shall” is used 980 times in the Form of Government. These new “essentials,” he says, would include review of session minutes every twelve months, an outside audit of the church’s books every year, and kneeling during ordination. Adee expresses sympathy for seminary students trying to review all of them in preparation for ordination.

Most of the “shalls” turn out to be relatively innocuous. The notorious one in G-6.0106b is exceptional in its exclusionary spirit. And some of the “shalls” have the opposite force. The list of “rights” of church membership includes “to vote and hold office” (G-5.0202). And there is this declaration (G-4.0403):

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall give full expression to the rich diversity within its membership and shall provide means which will assure a greater inclusiveness leading to wholeness in its emerging life.

Because of this commitment, we have committees on representation and the requirement (G-9.0104) that:

All governing bodies shall work to become more open and inclusive and to correct patterns of discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age, marital condition (married, single, widowed, or divorced), or disability.

ence between the essentials of Reformed *faith* and the essentials of Reformed *polity*. The former, it says, have not been formally declared; the latter have been so declared, wherever the Book of Order says “shall.”

What Would the Reformers Say?

The spirit of these overtures is an amazing one for a church in the Reformation tradition even to think of adopting. The Reformers were deeply concerned about churchly ordinances and requirements, obedience to which had been made mandatory by the Catholic Church, even being considered necessary for salvation. Their judgment was that this led to superstition and tyranny rather than the edification of the

church. They made it clear that they respected the interpretations and procedures that the church had set forth in the past; but they were also ready to dissent when these added to Scripture or contradicted its central message, which they characterized as “faith and love” (C-5.010-011).

This insistence on the “shalls” of Presbyterian polity is, at its worst, a doctrine of salvation by works rather than by faith. And if it is not salvation by works, then it is even worse, inviting man-made polity to get in the way of the gospel of salvation by faith. All churches have differentiated between matters of *faith*, which are (ideally) unchangeable, and those of *order*, which are time-bound, determined largely on the basis of appropriateness and even convenience.

The Reformers were especially vocal when it came to monastic vows and the requirement of priestly celibacy. In harmony with several passages in the New Testament, they insisted that celibacy is a *gift* which, being a gift, can be taken away (C-5.245, 7.248). Therefore they warned against “entangling vows of single life” (C-7.249) and “monastical vows of perpetual single life” (C-6.126).

As Archbishop Tutu has pointed out, today we require celibacy only of gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. This is certainly contrary to the spirit of the Reformation, which opposed monastic vows and requirements of celibacy as both *impracticable*, leading only to hypocrisy, and as an offensive *binding of the conscience*.

The observations in the last few paragraphs apply to these conservative proposals when they are taken *at face value*, in their *intent*.

But in practice their bark is worse than their bite, because the Book of Order must always be *interpreted and applied* within the framework of the entire Constitution. Through the years the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly has specified the meaning of G-6.0106b (“6b” for short) in a number of ways, making clear that it is *not in fact an absolute and unconditional prohibition, applicable under all conceivable circumstances*.

For example, you cannot refuse to ordain someone merely because of sexual orientation; the refusal must be based on *practice*. Furthermore, you *cannot ask prying questions*; there must be reasonable cause for inquiry, some “direct and specific knowledge” based on “factual allegations.” Even if there is some kind of “self-acknowledgment” it must be “plain, palpable, and obvious.” And since 6b talks about *all* the practices that are called sins in the Book of Confessions, an examining body *cannot single out* sexual orienta-

tion and ignore other possible sins. Although this was the intent of many in the church when they proposed and approved 6b, it is unworthy, giving credence to *stereotyping* and engaging in obvious *discrimination*.

Recently there was much furor over the ruling by the PJC of Redwoods Presbytery that the Rev. Jane Spahr had the right to perform marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples. The PJC pointed out that G-6.0106b applies only to ordination and does not affect the Directory for Worship; indeed, an AI issued by the 1991 General Assembly did not use mandatory language in cautioning against such ceremonies.

In ways like these, Amendment B has already been limited in its scope. We are learning that it is one thing to say, "Let's pass a law forbidding their ordination"; it's another thing to interpret that law in a way that is compatible with the entire Constitution of our church.

What the Report Does Not Do

But now let's notice what the TTF report *does not do*.

To many the most bitter medicine is Recommendation 6: that, if the General Assembly approves the previous recommendation, it *adopt no additional AIs, not remove any existing ones, and send no constitutional amendments to the presbyteries that would change the church's policy on these matters*. This recommendation is accompanied by an exhortation that we remember our obligation "to conciliate, mediate, and adjust differences without strife, . . . prayerfully and deliberately" (D-1.0103, cited in lines 1469-72).

Approval of Recommendation 6 would perpetuate the church's prejudicial teachings about homosexuality, whose intent has been to exclude GLBT persons from ordination. And in exhorting the church to continue engaging in dialogue and discernment, the TTF *has totally forgotten to mention* those persons who are most affected by the ecclesiastical warfare of recent years, our gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender members, many of whom have been called to church office but have encountered various obstacles, including "review" by higher governing bodies and their Permanent Judicial Commissions.

Perhaps most damning, the TTF did not give any explicit consideration to issues of *power*, one of the four themes it was directed to consider. Aggressive exercise of power — through the channeling or withholding of money, through the power of the press and the internet, and through disciplinary proceedings — has been noticeable for many years in the PC(USA).

The Covenant Network, More Light Presbyterians, and the Witherspoon Society have all said that the TTF report, while it has many positive features, *falls short* of their goal of removing Amendment B or 6b, and that therefore they *do not endorse* the report's recommendations, especially Recommendation 6.

In characterizing the report, a number of people have suggested that it gives us a glass *half full* — but also *half empty*. The question they have posed, therefore, is whether the glass should be poured out onto the floor — rejected entirely — or whether we should improve it, *fill it up*.

What Will Happen at the Assembly?

In the agenda of the Assembly, the TTF report will probably come to the floor early, with a recommended response from the Assembly committee that deals with the report. We can foresee several basic kinds of responses:

1. *Oppose it*. Many conservative organizations are positioning themselves against the report, especially its Recommendation 5, which offers an authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108 concerning the legitimacy of disagreements with the constitution as long as these are over "non-essentials."

The New Wineskins movement promises that, if this part of the Task Force report is approved, it will start a campaign to get congregations to sign a formal threat to withdraw from the church. The hope is to drive a hard bargain with the General Assembly, letting them leave with their property and continue to draw pensions. (This hardball strategy has been compared, not surprisingly, to that of Karl Rove and Tom DeLay in national politics.)

Stockton Presbytery is sending an overture to change the constitution (G-8.0100-07) to state that a congregation's property "is the sole property of the church" except for the amount of financial assistance provided by the wider church; a congregation could sever its relationship by a vote of 60 percent of the active members.

In the face of ultimatums like these, some commissioners to the Assembly may feel reluctant to risk driving the conservatives out of the church.

But most commissioners are likely to resent this kind of brinkmanship, an all-or-nothing insistence on one's own point of view. It stands in sharp contrast with the attitude of the *inclusive conservatives* on the TTF, who were part of the consensus approving the report as a whole.

And many commissioners will want to add another point: The church cannot stifle its public witness in behalf of *justice* and *God's all-embracing love* for the sake of a superficial *peace* — peace among various factions within the church, and peace with a noisy segment of public opinion.

2. *Block it or limit its effect.* Another conservative strategy has recently emerged. We have already mentioned the overture from Pittsburgh Presbytery to amend the Book of Order, the overture from Philadelphia Presbytery to amend the TTF's Recommendation 5, and the overture from New Covenant Presbytery to issue a different kind of AI. All are intended to *prevent* any action on Recommendation 5, or, if the Assembly should be disposed to approve it, to *limit its effect*.

Either way, approval of these overtures would *nullify three centuries of American Presbyterianism*, which has repeatedly given flexibility of judgment to governing bodies in deciding what is an essential; this principle is now stated explicitly in G-6.0108.

3. *Label it a "constitutional crisis."* San Diego Presbytery on March 21 adopted an internal resolution (not an overture) that not only reaffirmed its list of "Essential Tenets and Reformed Distinctives" (adopted in 2003) but engaged in brinkmanship. If the TTF's Recommendation 5 is adopted, the presbytery's moderator will appoint a task force that is to make its report at the September meeting of presbytery. It will consider

- whether the change creates a constitutional crisis,
- whether it creates a state of "biblical and confessional defection,"
- whether the covenant binding congregations and presbyteries together has been breached,
- whether the change minimizes or eliminates the presbytery's obligation to abide by the polity and discipline of higher governing bodies,
- whether the change compromises the PC(USA)'s ability to exercise governance over its presbyteries,
- what will be the future relationship between the presbytery and the PC(USA), and
- what future steps the presbytery will take to address its concerns with the PC(USA).

4. *Exploit it.* Now we come to an even farther-reaching strategy. It has been clear that, if the TTF's Recommendation 5 were to be approved by the Assembly, presbyteries would have more leeway in approving candidates for ordination. Conservative presbyteries might become more conservative, progressive ones more progressive. (That is not

a certainty, however. Even conservative presbyteries might ordain "out" candidates whom they know and respect as individuals. Most presbyteries already ordain people with whom they disagree on various points, which are sometimes major points.)

Looking ahead to this possibility and even trying to hasten it, the conservative Beaver-Butler Presbytery in western Pennsylvania has approved an overture to allow congregations, by a two-thirds vote, to *change their presbytery and synod affiliations*. The effect would be to make all presbyteries *non-geographical* — something that is at present an exception to the rule, permitted only for ethnic reasons in the Dakota Presbytery and three Korean presbyteries. Presbyteries at both ends of the doctrinal spectrum would become more homogeneous, depriving us of the task of living together with our differences.

5. *Support it.* Many moderates, including most of the recent Moderators of the General Assembly, see the TTF's Recommendation 5 as a step forward, compatible with the Adopting Act of 1729, the longtime practice of the church, and the present G-6.0108. In addition, two presbyteries have sent overtures to the General Assembly urging support of the TTF report.

6. *Vacillate.* Some progressives, disappointed that the TTF report does not recommend removal of Amendment B and even counsels taking no action on this issue, may feel inclined to vote against the report.

For conservatives, the TTF report *goes too far*; for progressives, it *falls short*, specifically in its Recommendation 6. These are quite different reasons for opposing the report. Progressives are more likely to feel that the report is *broken* and *needs to be fixed*.

7. *Fix it.* My own prediction — and my own preference — is that the Assembly will *support the TTF's Recommendation 5* and *oppose Recommendation 6*, which would preclude taking any action on removing B and the negative AIs.

What Will the Assembly Do?

The General Assembly is not the TTF. The dynamics at work in the two bodies are quite different.

The TTF felt that it was important to seek unanimity. In order to achieve this, they approved the report and its recommendations as a carefully crafted whole, as "one package." Unanimity would have been lost if any feature — especially any of the recommendations — had been re-

moved.

That was appropriate procedure for a small group that met in intimate encounter over a period of four years. But the same procedure is not feasible for the church as a whole, or even for the commissioners to the 2006 General Assembly, despite the desirability of reaching consensus. The Assembly is a large body that must work through discussion, debate, and majority vote, even though opportunities are made in the committees for more informal discussions and consensus building.

The TTF, because of its own experiences, felt it essential to approve all the recommendations together, as a single package. But the Assembly is not in any sense obliged to follow the TTF's example. The TTF is in no sense an autonomous body. Neither is it a commission acting in our stead. It is the creature of the 2001 General Assembly, which directed it to report each year to the to the General Assembly — and, it added, *to the presbyteries*.

When the Assembly considers the recommendations in the TTF report, it will most likely vote on them separately, one by one. It will be quite proper for them to approve Recommendation 5 and disapprove or take no action on Recommendation 6.

That course of action becomes even more likely when we recall that, during the years when the TTF was doing its work, the presbyteries have been discussing the “ordination question” — something that the TTF decided *not* do in its report. *Twenty-two presbyteries* have sent overtures to the 2006 General Assembly for *revocation of all previous AIs and removal of G-6.0106b*.

The General Assembly has every right, then, after

- *praising* the TTF,
- *adopting* its Recommendations 1-5 (and also 7, as a matter of procedural housekeeping), and
- *dismissing it with thanks*, then to
- *approve these overtures, thereby bringing the TTF's work to its appropriate conclusion, carrying forward the spirit already expressed in its vote on TTF.*

Let's conclude with some practical considerations. Adoption of the TTF's Recommendation 5 can give the church experience with this new mode of approach, emphasizing mutual encounter and discernment. The TTF, while acknowledging the impassioned debates over the issues of sexuality and ordination raised by G-6.0106b, has proposed “ways for the church to live faithfully while dealing with those issues”

(lines 1367-68).

If the Assembly also sends an amendment to the presbyteries repealing or altering G-6.0106b, it will have to be voted on *within one year* after the adjournment of the Assembly. (Some of us might like more time for living with the GA's response to the TTF report, but the Book of Order does not allow for that.) There would be the usual debate and political maneuvering. But adoption of Recommendation 5 could also remind the church about a principle that is as old as its organized life in North America — and remind it that this principle has *not* led to disaster in the past but in fact has given us the diverse church we already have.

Something More That Can Be Done

Ever since the landmark 1978 decision cautioning against ordaining gays and lesbians, our church has also *defended their civil rights* and *welcomed them as members*.

What Does the Advisory Committee on the Constitution Say?

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) has given its advice to the General Assembly concerning the TTF report. After clarifying a number of issues already decided by the General Assembly or its Permanent Judicial Commission, it declares the TTF's Recommendation 5 to be in good order, something that the Assembly can approve if it so chooses.

The ACC also notes *two important questions that remain open*.

1. It raises the possibility, without judging either way, that the AIs issued by General Assemblies *prior* to the approval of G-6.0106b might appropriately be eliminated, on the grounds that they *added* to the constitutional standards then existing, *rather than interpreting* them. It is totally in order, then, to consider the proposal, made in most of the overtures sent by the presbyteries, to revoke all AIs prior to the addition of “6b.”

2. It notes that no GA and no PJC has addressed the question whether G-6.0106b is *limited* by G-6.0108. Thus a governing body, as it deliberates on a candidate's suitability for ordination, has discretion to regard “6b” as *not an essential of Reformed faith and polity*.

In keeping with that spirit, an overture from Cincinnati Presbytery calls on the General Assembly to amend the 1978 policy statement by deleting seven statements which set homosexuality in a negative light.

Those who were at the 2004 General Assembly will recall a dispute, continuing long after the close of the Assembly, over a number of negative quotations read out by commissioner Scott Schaeffer during a debate over revoking the hostile AIs. Some of these were from the background paper and thus were not part of the 1978 Assembly's action. But there are negative and contemptuous evaluations of homosexuality in the Assembly's policy statement, too. Schaeffer's purpose was to point out the attitudes about homosexuality that were prevalent in 1978, when the statement was adopted.

If you go to the www.pcusa.org web site, click on Search, and type in "homosexuality," the first thing that pops up is this 1978 statement.

Much has happened since 1978. The American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association have made important statements about homosexuality and about attempts at "conversion therapy" which assume that it is a reversible "disorder." There have also been many discussions of biblical and doctrinal perspectives on homosexuality. It is time for the church's most formal policy statement on sexual orientation to be brought up to date and be made less blatantly offensive.

Continued on next page

Princeton professor William Stacy Johnson, a member of the Theological Task Force, has summarized six perspectives on homosexuality, and these may help commissioners to the General Assembly as they reflect on the Cincinnati overture.

- *the "prohibition" view*: homosexuality is a perversion of God's created order
- *the "definitive guidance" view*: homosexual orientation and conduct is a tragedy, to be responded to with repentance and abstinence
- *the "justice" view*: homosexuality is like other natural conditions, and reconciliation comes when heterosexuals repent of singling this out as the major sin
- *the "pastoral" view*: homosexual relationships may be disobedient in form but obedient in substance, and committed same-sex relationships are better than promiscuity
- *the "celebration" view*: homosexuality is a fact of creation, to be regarded as God's good gift
- *the "consecration" view*: homosexuality is a fact of creation, but ambiguous, needing to be rightly ordered by consecrating one's sexuality in an exclusive, committed relationship

Douglas Ottati will be signing his new book at GA

Doug Ottati, professor at Union Seminary/PSCE in Richmond and a regular contributor of a column of "theological musings" in the Witherspoon Society's *Network News*, has just published a new book entitled *Theology for Liberal Presbyterians and Other Endangered Species*.

He will be signing copies of his book at General Assembly on Thursday, June 15 from 11:00-1:00 and 5:00-6:00 at the Cokesbury Bookstore in the Exhibit Hall.

Here's the publisher's notice for the book:

In this witty, accessible, and concise book, theologian Doug Ottati contends that liberal Presbyterians and other liberal Protestants still have much to contribute to the contemporary world. Offering an alternative to evangelical and conservative thought that he believes now pervades the larger culture, Ottati presents what he sees as the foundations of liberal, theological thought. Writing out of the Reformed tradition and a theology of grace and with a dose of humor, he addresses current issues such as evangelism, the ordination

of homosexuals, and the war on terrorism. Ideal for individual or group study, this book is a call to liberal Presbyterians and other liberal Protestants to restate, rethink, and revise traditional theologies and beliefs in the face of contemporary knowledge and realities.

We're proud to note that many of the essays in the book have appeared previously in *Network News*.

Published by Geneva Press
Price: \$17.95
ISBN: 0-664-50289-X

Other matters coming to the Assembly

Divestment Dispute

The 2004 General Assembly initiated a process of phased, selective divestment from multinational corporations that contribute to the construction of the “separation barrier” between Israel and the West Bank, or profit from the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, or contribute to Palestinian violence. MRTI (the PCUSA’s Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee) was directed to explore ways in which to do this and report back to the 2006 Assembly.

A divestment decision by the General Assembly would affect the investment portfolios of both the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation, although the amount of investments involved in this question is relatively very small.

It took several weeks for Jewish organizations to find out about it. Then they reacted with fervor, labeling the action anti-Semitic and claiming that the Presbyterians were equating Israel with Nazi Germany. (Feelings were exacerbated because the same General Assembly had made statements, quite unconnected with this action, concerning a “Messianic” Presbyterian congregation and criticizing “Christian Zionism.”) Ministers who have spent years cultivating good relations with Jewish congregations suddenly received angry phone calls from local rabbis, calling for private or public discussion of the GA’s action.

And of course there has been internal Presbyterian discussion, some of it manifesting a desire not to seem anti-Semitic, some of it probably reflecting suspicion about the national church. Other Presbyterians, concerned about the injustices resulting from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and heeding the voices of Christians living in the area, have defended the General Assembly’s actions.

Several presbyteries (Baltimore, Eastern Virginia, Florida, Great Rivers, The James, New Covenant, Mississippi, New Covenant, Seattle, Sheppards and Lapsley, Sierra Blanca, Tampa Bay, and Twin Cities) have sent overtures to repeal, suspend, or modify the 2004 resolution. The Presbytery of Great Rivers in Illinois calls on the Assembly to rescind the action only with respect to Caterpillar, whose headquarters are in Peoria. It asks that the Assembly “recognize Caterpillar for its responsible actions as a global corporate citizen.”

Other presbyteries (Chicago, National Capitol, New York City, San Francisco, and Transylvania) have sent overtures that reaffirm the Assembly’s action, call upon MRTI to invest PCUSA funds only in “peaceful pursuits,” and actively foster projects that will encourage peace and mutual development between Israelis and Palestinians.

MRTI has tried to engage in closed-door conversations with five companies that are candidates for divestiture – Citigroup, ITT Industries, Motorola, Caterpillar, and United Technologies – with varying results. In its report to the Assembly, it will propose continuing to explore the issues, postponing any specific recommendations until the 2008 Assembly.

As this subject is debated, we need to remember that the Mission Responsibility Through Investment program uses divestment as only one among many means to open dialogue with U.S. corporations to encourage responsible policies. Such efforts helped move the Republic of South Africa away from apartheid toward becoming a multi-racial state in the 1980s; they have influenced mortgage lenders to make their policies more fair for low-income borrowers and people of color; they have obtained agreement from a number of petrochemical companies to provide safer conditions for their workers. This use of the church’s wealth, in short, has been an effective tool for justice.

Social Witness Policy

A number of documents dealing with current issues are coming from ACSWP, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy. These are important, not only because the issues are pressing ones, but because statements adopted by the General Assembly become the policy of the Assembly and its agencies.

The paper on *globalization* deals with issues of international trade, including forced labor, inhumane working conditions, and human trafficking. A number of measures are recommended for action by congregations and governing bodies.

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

A policy on treatment of *people with disabilities*, referred to ACSWP from the 1999 General Assembly, challenges the church to prophetic witness in behalf of justice and compassion.

Each General Assembly updates its overview of *human rights* around the globe. Because of disclosures about prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, the U.S. is prominent in this year's update; the Assembly will be called on to reaffirm its opposition to torture and abusive treatment of detainees, supporting the Geneva Conventions, and underscoring the importance of U.S. judicial review and Congressional oversight.

There will be a document on *Iraq*, emphasizing the responsibility of the U.S. for peaceful and orderly transition from occupation to democracy.

A policy statement applies traditional principles about *usury* to current concerns about what is called "predatory lending" — practices ranging from payday loans to "sub-prime" loans and excessive credit costs.

In light of current concerns about *Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid*, especially in light of the coming retirement of the Baby Boom generation, there is a paper on "Economic Security for Older Adults," calling for measures to protect these vital social insurance programs.

The church's policy on *energy* was last formulated in 1981 in the wake of the two oil crises of the 1970s. The 2002 General Assembly asked ACSWP to formulate an update in light of new concerns about production, consumption, costs, and "energy security."

Similarly the policy statement on *the value of human life*, adopted in 1981, is being updated at the request of the 2000 General Assembly.

Finally, the PC(USA) has already looked ahead to the hundredth anniversary of the so-called *Social Creed of the Churches (1908)*, in which a number of issues concerning labor and industry were addressed, leading to many reforms in state and federal legislation. Presbyterians are already consulting with United Methodists, Disciples, the United Church of Christ, and the National Council of Churches to explore the possibility of updating the "Social Creed" for the 21st century, in which labor issues will be increasingly global in scope.

Peacemaking

Baltimore Presbytery has sent an overture to expand the Peacemaking Program by establishing a training program in "proactive, constructive nonviolence," along the lines of the presbytery's own "Transforming Violence to Wholeness" program.

Energy

Heartland Presbytery has sent an overture calling for an addition to the chapter in the Book of Order entitled "The Church and Its Mission" (G-3.0100-0401). It has a list of ways the church is "participating in God's activity in the world through its life for others"; the overture would insert, before the last of these, a new clause:

protecting the environment and promoting sustainable living, reverently working as responsible and faithful stewards of God's creation . . .

Some confusion was created when the *Layman Online* said that it would add a new "essential." Let's put an end to the confusion and obfuscation.

While this chapter is a valuable *summary* of the mission of the church, too often overlooked, it is *not a list of "essentials"* of Reformed faith and practice. If the General Assembly votes positively on the Heartland overture, it is not adding a new "essential" or contradicting the spirit of the TTF report, which counsels flexibility in considering essentials.

**Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.**

(Isa. 58:4 RSV)

Working as partners

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

Partnership Commitments

1. Shared Grace and Thanksgiving

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

2. Mutuality and Interdependence

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

3. Recognition and Respect

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

4. Open Dialogue and Transparency

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

5. Sharing of Resources

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

Other perspectives on matters coming to the General Assembly

More Light Presbyterians opposes recommendation of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church

The National Board of More Light Presbyterians thanks the 20 members of the Theological Task Force for four years of devoted work, prayer and reflection. Their task was daunting and they are to be commended for their faithful service to our beloved church.

However, the recommendation of the Task Force that the 217th General Assembly adopt “no additional authoritative interpretations, to remove no existing authoritative interpretations, and to send to presbyteries no...constitutional amendments that would have the effect of changing denominational policy in the main areas of the Task Force’s report...” continues to deny the lives and ministries of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Presbyterians right now.

While we value the call for discernment in the form of prayer and dialogue, true discernment is not possible unless all members of the church are free to speak openly about their lives and faith experience without fear of retribution. It is unreasonable to expect that LGBT Presbyterians will be in a position to share their witness while the threat of litigation under G-6.0106b remains. Further, it is unacceptable for our church after 30 years of struggle to ask our LGBT members, their families and supporters, to continue to wait while the church debates the worth of their membership.

The More Light Presbyterian Board calls for a decision right now for the full inclusion of all God’s children. We urge the PCUSA to delete G-6.0106b from the Form of Government and to set aside all authoritative interpretations that support discrimination against our LGBT members and officers. We commend the presbyteries that have sent overtures calling for this change. The church must not fear continued debate and discussion in the legislative process, for when all voices are heard, we may also hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.

We commend to the church the document of the 195th GA, *Historical Principles, Conscience, and Church Government*, which states: “the diversity of the church is its strongest asset in seeking to discover God’s will...The church protects its own minority point of view as if it were protecting its future, recognizing that the dissenter may well represent the will of God.”

For over 30 years, the PCUSA has violated this principle by failing to protect LGBT Presbyterians from discrimination and obloquy. G-6.0106b must be removed if the church is to be able to repent and embody ...

Peace with justice – Unity with equality – Purity with wholeness.



On Tract

Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006)

by Kenneth Smith

Jack Rogers’ latest book is a tract in the best sense of that word – a tract to help the PC(USA), and other Christian denominations as well, manifest the hope that “one day soon, our church will again uphold . . . biblical and confessional principles by welcoming our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers as full and equal members in our church and society.” I share this hope.

This book is not much longer than a tract (126 pages plus notes) and yet provides a comprehensive review of the topic, undertaken through the lens of Jesus’ gracious life and ministry. Jack looks at how Christian views on slavery and the role of African Americans, the role of women and divorce have changed over the years and the parallels between these earlier misunderstandings of Scripture and the current positions of those opposed to full inclusion of LGBT persons. He reviews PC(USA) guidelines for “a positive and not a restrictive use of Scripture in matters of controversy,” and uses them to look at the biblical passages most often cited in this debate. He takes on the arguments against same-sex marriage and the belief in male gender superiority on which they are often based. Finally, he offers his recommendations for the PC(USA).

The use and interpretation of Scripture is certainly an important issue for Jack. As he says, in recalling his own journey from reflexive opposition to homosexuality to writing a tract advocating full inclusion of LGBT persons, “I changed my mind initially by going back to the

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Theological musings

On Staying Rather Than Leaving

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

With the action of its 217th General Assembly on the Final Report of the Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church, the PCUSA has an opportunity to take a problematic and ambiguous step that some see as a way forward. A way forward because the Report and its recommendations will allow some called and qualified gays and lesbians to be ordained (although this already happens occasionally). Problematic because it will do so on the basis of a questionable interpretation of the *Book of Order*, in a manner that may sustain serious challenges, and without furnishing a theological interpretation of the substantive issue: human sexuality and gay and lesbian relationships. Ambiguous because it will allow courts of the church to continue to deny ordination to called and qualified gays and lesbians and because it will place particular (and courageous) gay and lesbian candidates for ordination in the difficult and often painful position of having the theological significance of their own lives debated in their own sessions and presbyteries.

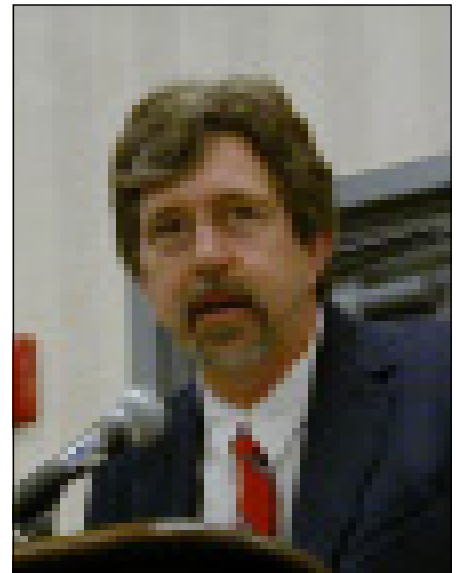
This, at present, may be the best-case scenario (unless all recommendations pass except number six, which calls for a moratorium on proposals to change the ordination standards). Another possibility is that the GA will not adopt the Report's chief recommendations. In that case, things remain as they are – a church that officially and as a matter of its explicit polity and predominant practice spurns the gifts and participation of gay and lesbian persons of faith in ordained positions of leadership. Perhaps the

outcome will be even more muddled than a mere theologian with no special expertise in polity can imagine.

In any case, some of us on the left will probably face the question: "Why remain in the Presbyterian Church (USA)?" After all, can't one follow Jesus and be faithful in other churches, and without being bound to an institution that rejects the talents and questions the suitability of so many good people? Can't leaving it be an act of honesty, courage, protest, or even necessity?

To my mind, it may be all of these things. Especially because I regard the issues of the Church's stand on gay and lesbian ordination and relationships finally to be a matter of faithfulness to the gospel of grace and its inclusive embrace of human beings, I can only respect conscientious decisions to leave. Personally, however, I cannot now make that decision. I want to affirm the community of believers that is the Presbyterian Church (USA) despite its past and current weaknesses and failures. Right now to leave this particular church – an act of honesty and protest for some – would be for me personally an act of capitulation and failure. I have received too much from this community of faith, worship, and fellowship and I am also too committed to its change and renewal to leave other, similarly committed Presbyterians.

In the end, I suppose I must admit that I am not looking for an elite church made up only of like-minded and (from my own perspective) right-minded



people. I am not looking for an ideal or a utopian church, just a historical one in a better state of repair. I want to stay because I believe that critical loyalty to the Presbyterian Church (USA) is worthwhile and that, by the grace of God, both its change and renewal are possible.

If the GA in Birmingham adopts the recommendations of the task force (either substantially or in full), there will be some who celebrate the measure of progress that action represents. There will be some, myself among them, who will see in that action some evidence that a truer change may come, and who will want to thank members of the task force for discharging a difficult and important work. But there will be others, and I surely will be among them, too, for whom the problems and ambiguities will temper if not entirely preclude any genuine celebration. This column is written for them, for the faithful Presbyterians (and especially our LGBT sisters and brothers) who will feel the weight of the frustrations, continuing injustices, and ambiguities. Leave the Presbyterian Church (USA) if you must. I can only respect your decision to do so. But stay if you can. We can use the company.



Breaking Down Barriers: Israel/Palestine

by Linda Bergh, Syracuse, NY

“Is there anybody out there?” read the graffiti on a section of the 26' high, razor-wire topped separation barrier that stretches along one of Jerusalem's borders. This concrete separation barrier, proceeding around Jerusalem, around three sides of Bethlehem, and winding on southward, is a physical separation which symbolizes the many facets of separation and oppression which the Israeli government's Occupation policies have created between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. How did this happen? What role do Palestinians play in this?

In January of this year, 2006, eleven Central NY United Methodists joined forty-five other United Methodists from throughout the U.S. on a journey to Israel/Palestine, seeking to listen, see, and learn about the efforts toward peace with justice in these lands. Our time frame extended from the celebration of Armenian Christmas (1/18) through the Palestinian elections (1/25) and the election results, before our departure on January 27th. We stayed in Bethlehem in the West Bank.

Two peoples want and need a homeland in Israel/Palestine. For the Jews, who suffered an oppression in Europe that culminated in the horror of the Holocaust, coming to this site of the Zionist dream seemed the answer. The U.S. and the U.N. agreed and, in 1948, Israel was formed. For the Palestinians, this land where they lived was home. However, the means by which Israel came into existence displaced many of them. They, too, need to be able to have their home. Plans have been put forth for both peoples to live in

these lands, but none have yet been fully negotiated. While the violent acts of some Palestinians as suicide bombers must be stopped, the violence of daily dehumanization and oppression by Israeli government policies must change as well.



Bethlehem terminal/ checkpoint

Viewing the effects of the Occupation and Israeli policies on both the Palestinian and Israeli Jewish peoples gives one a sense of urgency for a just solution. Much of what is happening in the West Bank can be termed “de-development”. Illegal Jewish settlements built on Palestinian land stand on hilltops and hillsides around East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In fact, they can be seen in the midst of Hebron and on the tops of some of the south Hebron hills. Dynamiting for settlements above the village of Wadi Fouqin has caused cracks in the school building, and makes Palestinian villagers concerned about the stability of their homes. Sewage systems from the extensive hilltop settlement sometimes break, polluting the fertile farmlands in the valley below. Cutting off of the hilltop for more development is causing erosion and mudslides as well.

The separation barrier, or wall, in places becoming a tall electric fence with security sideroads, blocks farmers from their land or water sources, students from schools or universities, workers from jobs, families from relatives – even separating a parent from children if they have different area ID. [See photo on front cover.] For Palestinians to travel anywhere either within or outside of the West Bank, they must go through numer-

ous checkpoints. Young soldiers may decide arbitrarily when or whether to let them pass.

Going from Jerusalem into Bethlehem, our tour buses were usually allowed to pass, but around election time we were asked to get off the bus to go through the terminal. This was a highly improved and technical checkpoint, with

screened-in runways and catwalks for military above. Several Palestinian men were sitting and waiting to be allowed through. When we had made our way through, they had been told to wait outside in the cold and wind till it was decided they could pass through. They had already waited for three hours!

The separation barrier was to have been built right through the grounds of Al Quds University, but international activist pressure caused Israel to change the route slightly. Similarly, on the Mount of Olives, a Catholic convent for Palestinian Christians was able to convince the Israeli government not to wall them off from their congregation completely. But for the farmers who just want to farm, or people who need to get to an Israeli hospital, the barrier and checkpoints may mean a livelihood or not -- or life or death.



Home demolitions, with no regard for a family's needs and no recognition of centuries-old deeds of ownership, happen in the name of security. Cave-dwellers in the southern hills of Hebron have had even their cave homes smashed. They may not build homes or re-inhabit their caves, and must have a special permit even to live in tents on their own land. If land is proven to be uninhabited by way of aerial photographs, the Israeli government claims it.

Acts of destruction by over-zealous illegal settlers in Palestinian lands occur with the purpose of getting Palestinians to leave. We saw fields of olive trees cut down to stumps by settlers just the week before. These stumps, if they survive, will take years to grow and be fruitful again. The Israeli government continues to allow the building of illegal Jewish settlements on Palestinian land.

More Palestinian land is confiscated for the Israeli-only bypass roads and highways which are inaccessible to Palestinians. These roads effectively allow Israelis to travel through the land without going near Palestinians, and ensures that Palestinians must take many back roads and round-about routes in their travels.

Israeli Jews also suffer from the effects of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. Their presence in the West Bank as soldiers makes this the only image of Jews which many young Palestinians have. And for the Israeli Jewish young people, for whom military service is compulsory, duty in the West Bank may cause these young minds to be haunted by the dehumanizing acts they are encouraged / ordered to carry out. Otherwise, they may be deeply marked with "we/they" thinking and reliance on a power and control mindset.

Some of our Methodist group heard a member of "Breaking the Silence" speak about his experience as a young soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces serving in the West Bank. His family was proud of him, and he felt that he was a good and loyal person doing his duty. One night in a house search in the West Bank, he realized that he was holding a

gun on an older man, a Palestinian father, who had to ask permission to use his own bathroom. As the young soldier proceeded to a bedroom in the home, and began to dump things out of a child's schoolbag, he glanced over and saw the young boy looking at him. Suddenly he thought to himself, "I'm a monster. I belong to one of the best, most moral armed forces in the world, and my family thinks of me as a good son, but this child sees a monster." Later, this young soldier found "telling his story" as a source of healing for the behavior he had become part of.

Israeli Jews also suffer as the very land they love becomes polluted, denuded, and stripped of some of the most productive farmlands because of the zealous encroachment of illegal Jewish settlers or preparations for the separation barrier. The very steps that have been taken to increase security and decrease fear have only led to an increase in fear for Israelis, as the desperation that has been created for many Palestinians sometimes breaks out in violence.

And finally, the increased separation between peoples who have had some experience of living and working together, Jews and Palestinians, in the past--this increased separation



Demolished home in foreground, with one of several tents where family now lives in lower right foreground

also has increased the amount of "not knowing" one another.

There are voices speaking for peace, people working for peace in Israel/Palestine. Palestinian Christian teachers and pastors in Bethlehem and in Jerusalem spoke to us of the importance of education in giving youth a sense of self-worth, hope, and positive ways to deal with problems. One creative Palestinian teacher of English, at a Christian girls' school in Bethlehem, had her students keep diaries. These were diary entries during the years of invasion and curfew in 2000 - 2004. They were published in the book *The Wall Cannot Stop our Stories*.

Americans and Europeans involved in Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron continue to be present with both Palestinian families and with Israeli soldiers in the West Bank, trying to build understanding. These Christian Peacemakers sometimes stay with Palestinian families who fear attack or house demolitions.

In the village of Wadi Fouqin, where the anticipated separation barrier/wall will be built near the fertile valley, our Palestinian Muslim guide told of peaceful negotiations with an Israeli village on the other side of the "Green Line" or border. People in

Background to Overture 62 on Israel/Palestine divestment

San Francisco Presbytery has long been concerned about making investment decisions a conscious instrument of mission. In 1970 this Presbytery sent an overture to GA “that laid the groundwork for the socially responsible investment movement in the United Presbyterian Church.”¹ This year our overture aims to continue the selective phased divestment process in Israel/Palestine that was mandated by the GA in 2004 and increase Presbyterian investment in and understanding of the things which make for a just peace in the Middle East.

In response to the 2004 GA decision the national press highlighted the firestorm of criticism that was launched by those American Jewish organizations that belong to “The Israel Lobby.” Our actions were labeled anti-Semitic and misguided. What the press did not cover was the praise and encouragement that came our way from other Jewish organizations in the U.S. and Israel, and the gratitude from Palestinians.

The GA has been passing resolutions on Israel/Palestine since 1948, resolutions that received no response from the American Jewish community. Why did the use of the word “divestment” cause such a stir? Perhaps because money talks and the fear that if enough institutional investors talk with their money, Israel might be forced to actually make peace with the Palestinians.

The strategy of The Israel Lobby is to persuade us to rescind our action, or at least to soften it by substituting words like “corporate engagement” to describe the process that may lead to actual divesting from specific companies. *The Jerusalem Post* has already run several articles claiming that the divestment movement has ground to a halt. This gives the Israeli and Palestinian public that impression that the international community is backing down on its demands for a negotiated and just settlement of the conflict.

Some would sacrifice the human rights of Palestinians for interfaith harmony between Presbyterians and American Jews. We believe that interfaith relations purchased at the expense of justice are shallow and inauthentic. Our overture keeps the economic pressure on corporations profiting from the Occupation, while investing in activities that will promote authentic cooperation and understanding between Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans.

Walt Davis, HR, San Francisco Presbytery
April 20, 2006

¹ William Somplatsky-Jarman, “Mission Responsibility Through Investment,” *Church and Society*, Sept-Oct 2002, p. 7.

From the PRESBYTERIAN PEACE FELLOWSHIP:

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN US FOR CONVERSATIONS

at our booth in the
GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXHIBIT HALL

SATURDAY, JUNE 17 10:30 TO 11:30 PM

“Continuing the Dialogue on Colombia”

The Rev. Dr. Alice Winters – Peace Breakfast Speaker & PC(USA) Mission Worker in Colombia, and Milton Mejia and Anne Barstow – 2006 Peaceseeker Award Honorees (for the Accompaniment Program in Colombia)

SATURDAY, JUNE 17 3:00 TO 4:00 PM

“Presbyterian Peaceseeking Poet”

Ann Weems – 2005 Peaceseeker Award Honoree

MONDAY, JUNE 19 10:30 TO 11:30 AM

“Rethinking War, Rethinking Peace, Making Peace: Trusting the Nonviolence of Jesus Christ Today”

Discuss the issues and ideas raised in the Nov/Dec Issue of the journal *Church & Society*

Tom Driver, Content Editor, and Authors of Articles in the Issue

MONDAY, JUNE 19 3:00 TO 4:00 PM

“The Face of Accompaniment in Colombia”

Listen to stories of those who have been accompaniers in Colombia during this past year, and learn how you might become an accompanier.

TUESDAY, JUNE 20 10:30 TO 11:30 AM

“Back from Baghdad – Experiences with CPT in Iraq”

Beth Pyles, a Presbyterian who is a reservist with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) Iraq

TUESDAY, JUNE 20 3:00 TO 4:00 PM

“Saying NO to Torture”

Speaker TBA

Times are subject to change. Check with the Peace Fellowship booth at GA for an updated list of booth conversations.

Wisconsin town just says No to torture – and invites the PC (USA) to do the same

by Darla Dernovsek

Clinton, Wisconsin – Clinton might seem an unlikely location for Presbyterians to take a stand against the use of torture by the U.S. government.

The small Midwestern village of about 2,200 people is the kind of place where the annual parade bars motor-driven vehicles and the biggest issue in 20 years was passing a school referendum.

Yet residents of the town decided that taking a stand against torture was “a matter of faith,” according to Michelle Dennis, who helped lead a study group that met at First Presbyterian Church to complete the “Out of Horror, Hope” curriculum provided by the Presbyterian Church USA.

Dennis represented the study group when First Presbyterian’s Session voted unanimously to concur with The Presbyterian Initiative Against Torture, an overture to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The First Presbyterian group then presented the overture to the Milwaukee Presbytery, which also voted to support it.

The way the process won support for the overture was proof that talking about torture can lead to change.

“Torture is a difficult subject,” Dennis says. “It would be so easy for us here in Clinton, safe in our homes, to assume that everything is just as safe in the rest of the world. That is what we would prefer to believe. But we all know in our hearts that is not so.”

The education of Clinton church members began when Dennis and Mirjam

Melin, also from Clinton, traveled to Miami in January to participate in the No2Torture Epiphany conference. Troubled by reports that the government is using torture, they sought information and ideas to help them speak out on the issue from a faith-based perspective.

They learned about the conference from another Clinton resident, the Rev. Carol Wickersham, who organized the event and helped develop the No2Torture curriculum and Website (www.no2torture.org). Wickersham, who works at Beloit College, occasionally fills the pulpit at First Presbyterian. Although she was unable to participate in the study group, she provided resources and advice.

Dennis and Melin used published news reports from credible sources to provide accurate information about the use of torture and its impact on both victims and perpetrators. They relied on No2Torture materials for the faith perspective, with activities that included writing a confession of faith and discussing how the authors of The Theological Declaration of Barmen would have responded.

Dennis notes that only five community residents showed up for the first study group meeting, with two other residents joining later. But the group’s impact was greater than its size.

“Just having a notice about the No2Torture Study Group in the newsletter and the bulletin helped raise awareness that this is an issue that Presbyterians need to be concerned about,” Melin said. “It would have been great to have more people involved,

but we learned that simply organizing the group created many opportunities to share information with a wider audience.”

Those opportunities included giving a speech about torture to the Clinton Kiwanis Club, working with the local weekly newspaper to reprint a Presbyterian News Service article on the Miami conference and talking with a reporter for a daily newspaper in the nearby city of Janesville.

“We did not create the movement against torture,” Dennis says. “We simply joined a wave of Presbyterian churches and individual members speaking out against torture in the name of Jesus Christ, as we are directed to do in the Book of Order, by acting on behalf of those who are powerless and suffering, those who have been imprisoned unjustly and those who are treated inhumanely.”

The author

Darla Dernovsek is a freelance writer who lives in Clinton, Wisconsin, and participated in the study group about which she writes here.

Haiti: The Patient Remains in Critical Condition and Needs Enlightened Help

by Tom F. Driver

Not being a life-long Presbyterian, and only a fellow-traveler now, I am not used to thinking in terms of General Assemblies and Overtures. Furthermore, most of my efforts in recent years to get Presbyterians (and others) to take seriously the rape of democracy that the U.S. has performed upon Haiti have not been successful. So it was with some reluctance that I gave in to the nudging of Lois Baker (of Witherspoon and the Peace Fellowship) to write an overture about Haiti for the forthcoming Assembly in Birmingham. She had noticed that the Presbytery of South Florida had introduced an overture concerned mostly with Haitian refugees in this country, and she said we needed one that drew attention to the dreadful things going on in Haiti itself.

So I wrote one, pretty much at the last minute, and saw it readily adopted by the Session of the Rutgers Presbyterian Church in New York, a congregation of which I am an affiliate member. It went before the Presbytery of New York City on March 25, where it got a few friendly amendments before being approved unanimously. As of this writing, it is not yet posted on the PCUSA website, but should be soon.

There's not space here even to sketch the recent history in Haiti, in which the U.S. Government, in whole or in part, has played such an anti-democratic role. The overture's "Rationale" section (see below) gives the gist of the concerns that the church should have. The "Recommendations" themselves will soon

be available on the PCUSA website.

It is not too late for Presbyteries to endorse the overture. Even if they do not make the official deadline, their support can be "unofficial" and quite influential. We would very much like to hear from people who will be at the Assembly and who would like to speak up for Haiti.

RATIONALE

1. Since Haiti declared its national independence in 1804 after a successful war of rebellion from France, it has been subject to highly oppressive measures, usually of an economic nature but sometimes military, imposed upon it by stronger nations. Since the early 20th century the dominant force in Haiti's political and economic life has been the United States Government.

2. To speak only of recent troubles: Between 2000 and 2004, the U.S. Government, and organizations allied with it, de-stabilized Haiti by undermining its democratically elected President, fomenting a crisis that led to a second coup d'état against him. For example, in 2001 the U.S. government initiated a loan-embargo, using its veto power in the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) board of directors to block release of already-approved loans for health care, education, and water -- unjustly increasing the hardship of Haiti's people. Although U.S. interference in Haiti's political process has been observed for years by many scholars

and reporters, it has received scant attention in major news outlets until a work of investigative journalism was published in *The New York Times* in January this year. ("Mixed U.S. Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos: Democracy Undone: Back Channels vs. Policy," by Walt Bogdanich and Jenny Nordberg, January 29, 2006).

3. The Interim Government of Haiti that the U.S., France, and Canada, installed in March of 2004 has incarcerated many political prisoners. In spite of the recent presidential election, the democratic process in Haiti is far from secure.

4. Haitian people need political and economic empowerment more than they need charity. Indeed, the lack of such empowerment and the heavy-handed treatment of the Haitian government by the U. S. Government are prime causes of poverty in Haiti.

5. The people of the United States, by and large, have come to take Haiti's destitution for granted and to view it as irremediable. This Overture is predicated on the belief that the PCUSA has a responsibility to do what it can to correct these attitudes and to influence the U. S. Government to support the democratic aspirations of Haiti's poor, who are its vast majority.

Passed by the Presbytery of New York City, March 25, 2006.

What it's like to stand with a church that is in danger

by Anne L. Barstow

In June 2004 the Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia (IPC) had had enough: its executive secretary Milton Mejia had been receiving death threats from paramilitaries for months, but now one of its workers at its legal Center for Human Rights, Mauricio Aviles, had been arrested and jailed without due cause. The IPC asked the PCUSA for "accompaniment," for volunteers to come to Barranquilla and "be present," as an unarmed international presence, to force the paramilitaries to back off. When Rick Ufford-Chase convinced the G. A. C. to authorize a response, he turned to the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF) to carry out the program.

Since we began in November 2004, we have recruited, trained, and sent down 19 volunteers; 14 more have finished training and await assignment. Their age range is 23 to 73, and they are divided almost equally between men and women. Ten have asked to serve again. As they must pay their own way and give one to two months of their time to work that is sometimes uncomfortable and always risky, it is clear that something is happening here between these North American Presbyterians and the IPC, and that it is compelling.

I leave it to the IPC to say what this means to them - although their gratitude that we will join them in their time of crisis is palatable. Let me say instead what it means to the accompaniers and PPF. We are learning what it means to be a small but outspoken church that stands up against violence and injustice. We see faith being tested as Colombian

Christians continue to witness, even knowing the price that they must pay. As we spend days in the miserable displaced persons camps around Barranquilla we learn the value of "deep listening" to the suffering of others. We have found true partners in our own mission to oppose militarism, because the IPC is dedicated to nonviolent action. And we are grateful for the chance to do direct action for the peace of Christ.

To volunteer to accompany, contact Kelly Wesselink at kelly_ppf@yahoo.com.

To join a delegation to the IPC, apply to Parrish.Jones@starpower.net.

To contribute, send checks marked "Accompaniment" to either Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Box 271 Nyack, NY 10960 or E. C. O. # 051763.

We receive no money from the PCUSA for this project.

To write protest letters about these attacks on the IPC, go to <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/Global/colombia.htm> #support %20needed for Mark Koenig's "Call to Action," with addresses of the Colombian Vice President and its ambassador to the U.S.

Anne Barstow is the Director of Colombia Programs for the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Spiritual Activism Conference

Washington, D.C.
May 17-20

Want an alternative to the Religious Right, to the materialism and selfishness of the competitive marketplace, and to the religio-phobia and tone-deafness to spiritual concerns on the Left?

Rabbi Michael Lerner and Tikkun Magazine have announced a conference for May 17-20, centered on the proposal for a Spiritual Covenant for America, which is based in part on the conversations that took place at the July, 2005, conference in Berkeley, California, and was developed into a platform in Rabbi Lerner's recent book, *The Left Hand of God*.

The conference is the first East Coast appearance for the Network of Spiritual Progressives, co-chaired by Rabbi Lerner, Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, and Cornel West, professor of African American studies and Religion at Princeton University.

For details and registration, go to the Tikkun website: http://www.tikkun.org/community/spiritual_activism_conference/

The Cumberland Presbyterian Heritage: Two Highlights

by Gene TeSelle

As the PC(USA) holds a General Assembly jointly with the two Cumberland Presbyterian churches, it is appropriate to look at past relationships, highlighting two in particular, one connected with the separation of the churches, another with their partial reunion.

Separation

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized in 1810 in Dickson County, Tennessee, breaking away from the larger Presbyterian Church over two issues: “fatality” (the doctrine of unconditional predestination) and the requirement of a learned ministry.

A much-simplified version of the Westminster Confession was adopted when they formed a synod in 1813 and revised when they formed a General Assembly in 1829. In this confession, the section on God’s eternal decrees is shortened, and instead an explanation is attached (see Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III, 772-73); it makes some suggestions that are interesting and quite original. God did not reprobate or reject anyone from eternity, the statement says; rather, humankind became reprobate (not definitively damned) through sin. Similarly God’s grace of salvation is “as extensive as the legal condemnation, or reprobation.” All can become elect by receiving this grace; but they are not elect until they do receive it and are justified by faith.

This sounds very much like Karl Barth’s view that all are first condemned, then all are offered salvation. Barth got it from Schleiermacher, who

was saying this in Berlin about the time the Cumberlands were saying it in Dickson County, Tennessee. They are similar in taking a *sequential* rather than an either/or view of condemnation and salvation. Schleiermacher even defended his position as a new and improved version of “supralapsarianism,” the extreme Calvinist view that God from eternity differentiated the elect from the reprobate — in the process making the one important change that this is sequential rather than leading to “double issue.”

Despite the similarities, there is an important difference between the two. Schleiermacher thought that everything that happens is the direct result of God’s will. The Cumberlands would have called this “fatality.” For them, both condemnation and the offer of grace are contingent upon human response. Still the similarities are striking, and through Karl Barth this view of predestination has become widespread.

Reunion

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a partial reunion of the “Northern church,” the PCUSA, with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (leaving out the “Second” Cumberland Presbyterian Church, as it was called at that time, a segregated church for African Americans). It seemed advantageous both to the Cumberlands, who could reunite with the national church, and to the PCUSA, which could thereby become a truly “nationwide” church, strengthening its presence in the South.

Actually the PCUSA was not simply a “Northern church,” for it had presbyteries and synods composed of African Americans, especially in the Carolinas and Virginia, the result of “home missions” activity in the wake of the Civil War. After the reunion the Home Mission Board sent even more workers into the South, especially into Appalachia and into the “Black Belt,” setting up schools at all levels and organizing churches.

But this was the early twentieth century, at the height of legalized segregation and discrimination in the Southern states, and African Americans were incidental when whites thought about a nationwide church. In fact, they were an obstacle. Growth of the PCUSA in the South was impossible if congregations were to be a minority in the already existing African American presbyteries.

As a consequence, one of the conditions of reunion with the all-white Cumberland Presbyterian Church was to have racially segregated presbyteries. This was opposed by many northern leaders, and by the African-American presbyteries and synods of the PCUSA in the South, who organized to oppose reunion (eleven presbyteries voted against, and only two in favor). It was also mocked by Southerners in the PCUS, who had been criticized for setting up a racially segregated synod in 1901.



These and many other matters are discussed in the book by a founding member of the Witherspoon Society, Andrew Murray, under the title *Presbyterians and the Negro: A History* (Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966).

To bridge the doctrinal differences, the PCUSA in 1903 adopted several amendments to the Westminster Confession, added at the end (C-6.183 to 6.193 in our current *Book of Confessions*). The operative one was the “Declaratory Statement” that God’s love extends to all of humankind, so that all are “fully responsible for their treatment of God’s gracious offer”; in contrast to the older statement about “elect infants” (C-6.066), this statement rejects infant damnation.

The reunion was voted in both churches, and the first reunited General Assembly was held in 1907. Not all of the Cumberlands were happy about reunion, however, and they filed suit in several state courts; some of these lawsuits were successful, enabling congregations to keep their property in a continuing Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

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



dougking2@aol.com

Please put “web updates” in the subject line.

The Civil Rights movement in Birmingham

Our 217th General Assembly will be meeting in one of the most important cities in the history of the civil rights movement. You may want to learn a little of that history before you go there, and Gene TeSelle offers a quick survey of some good sources.

This is condensed from his longer article, which you can find on the Witherspoon web site at http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2006/civil_rights_story.htm

The richest and most recent book about the civil rights struggle in Birmingham is *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* by Diane McWhorter, which received the Pulitzer Prize in 2002. The author was growing up in Birmingham during the crucial years, with almost no awareness of what was going on; the book, then, is a journey of discovery, as she looked into her own family and the many other people in Birmingham who were players in the civil rights battle.

In her judgment the good Christians of the city were really venerating the lame pagan god of fire, Vulcan, patron of the steel industry, whose statue still presides over the city. She gives details on the many links between the police and the Klan, and she has become an expert on the troubling career of Gary Thomas Rowe, an FBI informant who was directly involved in far too many incidents of violence.

The key local leaders were Pastor Fred Shuttlesworth and Lucius Pitts, president of Miles College, both of them masters at planning demonstrations. They knew that it was more effective to deal with business leaders than with office holders, and boycott threats were often effective. After Bull Connor discredited himself by turning the fire hoses on children, there was “Miracle Sunday,” when firemen refused to use the hoses to quell another demonstration. Still the broken promises and the attacks kept up, requiring constant intervention and negotiation from the Kennedy administration.

Where does Diane McWhorter think we are now? She wrote a post-election piece suggesting that “morality” is the new “race.” Crusades against homosexuality have the same “scripted” and authoritarian character as the old arguments about race. In the meantime, she says, the Fox network helps promote the “trash culture” that is, along with our freedom, what the terrorists hate us for.

A Fire You Can’t Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham’s Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth by Andrew M. Manis, tells about a leader who was more a doer than a talker, belonged more among the working classes than among the professionals, perfected the strategy of using pressure and keeping it up, and was always willing to be personally on the front lines. In the process he set much of the civil rights agenda, starting with the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights in 1956.

The book tells about his confrontations with Bull Connor; his role in the landmark *New York Times v. Sullivan* libel case; his hosting of the Freedom Rides in Birmingham; his organizing of the 1962 Easter shopping boycott; the 1963 campaign which was joined by King after his failure in Albany, GA; his ongoing tensions with King about leadership and tactics; the Birmingham church bombings; and the Selma-to-Montgomery march. Without Birmingham the 1964 Civil Rights Act would not have been passed, and Shuttlesworth gets much of the credit.



Candidates for Moderator respond to Witherspoon questions

One of the first acts of the 217th General Assembly will be the election of a new Moderator. To help our readers weigh this important choice, the Witherspoon Society has invited each of the four candidates to respond briefly to five questions that reflect Witherspoon concerns – and, we believe, the concerns of the wider church.

With gratitude to the candidates for their cooperation in responding, we are happy to share their comments here, presenting them in alphabetical order, beginning on the next page.

The five questions were:

1. It seems likely that the coming General Assembly will be shaped by its response to the report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. What would you like to see as the outcome of the discussion of this report? Specifically, how do you respond to Part V, recommendation 5, with its proposed authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108, and recommendation 6, with its call for no further action during the 217th Assembly on “any of the major issues in the task force’s report, including Christology, biblical interpretation, essential tenets, and sexuality and ordination.”
2. Related to this, what are your thoughts on the 22 overtures coming to the Assembly, calling for the removal of G-6.0106b and related authoritative interpretations from the Book of Order?
3. Some have asserted that our church is deeply divided, and they have raised the possibility of leaving the PC(USA), or declaring a “constitutional crisis,” if the Task Force’s Recommendation 5 is adopted. How would you address this concern?”
4. A major debate has been going on since 2004, concerning the action of the 216th Assembly that called for study of the possibility of divestment from some corporations doing business in ways that have supported the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Palestinian acts of terrorism. Various overtures to this Assembly will call for abandoning that effort, or continuing it, or modifying it in some way. What do you think we should do at this point?
5. The actions and policies of the United States in relation to the use of torture have concerned many of us. There will be overtures urging further investigation into American use of torture, and into the responsibility of higher officers of government and the military. How do you believe the Assembly should deal with these proposals?

Remember, for news and views during General Assembly,
you’re invited to visit us on the Witherspoon site at
www.witherspoon.society.org

and don’t forget the new shared site created by More Light Presbyterians,
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Covenant Network, That All May Freely Serve,
Voices of Sophia, and The Witherspoon Society.
Just go to
www.justpresbys.org

The Rev. Deborah A. Block

**Pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church,
Milwaukee, Presbytery of Milwaukee**

<http://www.deborahblock.org/>

On the report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church.

I hope that this General Assembly will be shaped by the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church by imitating its spirit of respectful, faithful engagement. Before we consider outcomes of the Assembly, I have a concern for the “in-come,” what we bring to this General Assembly. We commissioners are not to represent our presbyteries or congregations, aren’t delegated by our affinity groups. This calls for a disciplined commitment to open-minded, open-hearted discernment and deliberation. I hope that we will come to this Assembly fully prepared and not fully positioned, ready and willing to seek God’s agenda for us.

The report deserves a well-informed discussion in committee and on the floor, born of thorough reading and ruminating, not rumor. I respect the unanimity of the task force. If the Assembly adopts the report, the recommendations together allow the intent of #5 to be worked in the life of the church. Recommendation 5 calls us to renew our commitment to the historic principles that define Presbyterians. It lifts up some essential strengths of our polity. I’m willing to exercise them toward the horizon of a healthier, more whole, body.

On the overtures calling for the removal of G-6.0106b.

There is a clear voice from 22 presbyteries calling for the removal of G-6.0106b and related authoritative interpretations. That voice is a lament over the exclusion of called, gifted, and qualified LGBT Presbyterians and it is a significant witness to the rest of the church. I, too, believe that God makes “no distinction” in calling and equipping persons for discipleship and ministry. Twenty-eight years as a woman in ministry and a deepening familiarity with the story of women’s ordination make me acutely aware of long and yet hopeful journeys toward our baptismal unity and equality.



Clergywomen have lived “justice delayed” after justice was denied in 1920 and 1930 (when women were granted the constitutional right to be ordained as elders but not ministers) and even when justice was granted in 1956. Both the insertion of G-6.0106b and efforts for its removal have been painful and polarizing, but I will testify to what I see and hear as a pastor. Preaching, teaching, prayer, study, and example are making a difference. The Spirit is at work. When Bibles open, hearts and minds open and church doors open.

On suggestions of some about leaving the PC(USA) or declaring a “constitutional crisis.”

As a pastor, I am called to invite all persons to the table. As Moderator, I would affirm that all Presbyterians belong at the tables of our life together and work to keep us there in a fair and faithful conversation. We should question the “deeply divided” diagnosis, not dismissing the seriousness of our differences, but not resigning to pessimistic scenarios.

On divestment from some corporations doing business in ways that support the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Palestinian acts of terrorism.

That the action of the 216th GA came as such a surprise to both Presbyterians and Jews raises a prior question about procedure and communication around decisions that will have impact on both the denomination and the larger community. Were voices from all perspectives heard? Was there enough time to make and interpret a decision of this magnitude? I’ve been involved since then in Presbyterian-Jewish dialog groups at the local and national level, but I still have many questions about divestment, and more that I want to learn about positive investment. What does it mean to be pro-peace in this complex context? I want the Presbyterian Church (USA) to be a peacemaking force in the world and work for justice and healing for all victims. I regret that we didn’t have an Assembly this past summer to deal with this very issue, and I welcome the opportunity before us to consider how we go forward.

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The Rev. Kerry Carson

Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Conrad, Iowa, North Central Iowa Presbytery

Web site: www.kerrycarson.com

On the report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church.

One of the gifts to the church from the Theological Task Force is the thoughtful and respectful approach they used in their work together. I would hope those qualities would characterize our work at General Assembly on their report and all our actions as well. Part “e” of Recommendation #5 states: “all parties should endeavor to outdo one another in honoring one another’s decisions . . .”. For me, that means living out in community the life we have been called to in Jesus Christ. In other words, how we treat one another in times of discussion and/or disagreement, as well as how we honor decisions once they are made is one of the clearest ways we witness to our faith.

When the General Assembly meets, we recognize that God calls us to faithful service and witness. As we seek to discern God’s will for the PCUSA, we will listen to hear God’s Word faithfully and with the refreshing, life-giving wind of the Spirit speaking truth in love. It is the spirit behind our motto: “Reformed, always being reformed.” Therefore, the Assembly will determine whether to adopt Recommendation #6 or take additional action.

On the overtures calling for the removal of G-6.0106b.

Ordination standards and the authoritative interpretations that define them continue to be an issue before the PCUSA. The overtures coming to the 217th General Assembly provide a new opportunity to appropriately revisit the issue. It is my hope that we will do so seeking to honor one another and our constitution in the process, both during and after the Assembly.



On suggestions of some about leaving the PC(USA) or declaring a “constitutional crisis.”

There are people who are saying they will leave if Recommendation #5 passes and those who will leave if it does not pass. There is hurt and frustration on many sides of this and other issues facing the PCUSA. In difficult times, I am reminded that the God who calls us is faithful in providing everything necessary for us to serve in the building of Christ’s Kingdom on earth. It is God who can reconcile differences, heal relationships, and renew our calling to serve Jesus Christ by serving one another “with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.” If elected as the Moderator of the 217th General Assembly, I will work to help facilitate experiencing God’s presence in the midst of our work, our decisions, our worship and our disagreements.

On divestment from some corporations doing business in ways that support the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Palestinian acts of terrorism.

The PCUSA has taken an active interest in the Middle East for most of our history. From sending mission personnel and working with partner churches to working for peace with justice, education, health, and ending poverty and hunger, we have historically sought to be a healing influence for all people in the region. Since 1948, our church has affirmed the right of Israel to exist, alongside a neighboring, independent, sovereign state for Palestinians.

The question of divestment must be seen in the context of this balanced approach to peace in the Middle East. For me, it is always appropriate for us to ask if the businesses we are invested in at home are acting in a consistent way with our mission goals abroad. It is also appropriate to listen to and work with our mission partners to shape a lasting peace in the Middle East. My hope is, as we seek to discern our next steps in our mission and investment goals and activities, that we do so through thoughtful, quiet and respectful conversation with ourselves and with our partners in both areas.

On U.S. use of torture.

The global “War on Terror” and the conduct of our government with regard to our prisoners of war provides an oppor-

Continued on page 33

The Rev. Joan S. Gray

Most recently interim pastor of College Park Presbyterian Church, Presbytery of Greater Atlanta

E-mail: jsgcommissioner@earthlink.net

On the report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church.

Voting recommendation 5 from the Peace, Unity and Purity report either up or down will not solve our denomination's conflict around the question of what constitutes Godly sexuality. Instead, I would like us to focus on recommendation # 2 of the Task Force report and use it to shape a new process of discerning God's will on these matters. What we really need is a more faithful, graceful, and courageous way of living together in the midst of our conflict until the day when God's Spirit brings us into one mind about how to interpret the Bible on issues of sexuality. If the Assembly does follow the call to discernment as proposed in recommendation 2, it is important that means be found to involve all Presbyterians who have a stake in this matter in that process without putting them at personal risk.

As for recommendation 6, I do not see the value of tying the Assembly's hands on these or any other matters. I trust the Holy Spirit to move the Assembly to take up whatever pieces of business it believes to be in the best interest of the church, whether recommendation 5 passes or not.

On the overtures calling for the removal of G-6.0106b.

I know that G-6.0106b is very painful to many members of our church, especially gay and lesbian Presbyterians. I am also aware, however, that our denomination is very much at odds over how to deal with issues concerning the sexuality of ordained persons in the life of the church. Due to the severity of this division I cannot be in favor of answering these overtures in the affirmative.

On suggestions of some about leaving the PC(USA) or declaring a "constitutional crisis."

In my estimation the idea of declaring a constitutional crisis if recommendation 5 passes verges on the hysterical. Our polity provides clear process by which those who are unhappy with the decisions of any governing body may work to have those decisions reversed. Those who disagree with whatever happened at GA regarding the Task Force report should avail themselves of that process. On the question of leaving the church, every Presbyterian has the freedom of conscience to decide for him or herself when he or she can no longer in good conscience remain in the PC(USA). However, those in leadership in the church would do well to remember that breaking apart the body of Christ except in situations of clear and serious apostasy is a very grave sin and breaks the heart of Jesus.



On divestment from some corporations doing business in ways that support the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Palestinian acts of terrorism.

I have some questions about the overall effectiveness of divestment as a strategy for social change. However, for a moral compass on this issue I go with some wisdom I heard from a former Presbyterian mission worker in the Middle East: "We should divest from those things that make for war and invest in those things that make for peace." In order to know which is which our church should engage in a serious process of study, discernment, and prayer. Listening to both Israelis and Palestinians should be at the heart

of how we figure out what God is calling us to do to be instruments of peace in the Middle East.

On U.S. use of torture.

Torture is abhorrent to any right thinking Christian and to any citizen who truly prizes democracy. I hope the General Assembly will continue to speak strongly against the use of torture for any purpose whatsoever by the US or any other government. The possibility of being killed, or worse, having someone I love killed in a terrorist action is part of the price I calculate when I say this. It is a price I am willing to pay in order to be a civilized human being, let alone a Christian.



The Rev. H. Timothy Halverson

Faith Presbyterian Church, Cape Coral, FL,
Peace River Presbytery

Web site: www.faithcapecoral.org

On the report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church.

The outcome for which I pray is that the report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church (PUP) will unite the General Assembly. The goal of this task force is to present “not a finished or perfect product, but a starting point” (line 1015) that would allow everyone to remain at the table. I hope that this report is viewed as an important first step in the process of genuine discernment rather than an ultimate irreversible and divisive ruling. Fostering peace, unity and purity mandates courage, strength and patience as we live inside the tension of diversity and spiritual growth.

I support PUP. I support Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 6 because I believe they provide a space for our denomination to stand within that tension.

On the overtures calling for the removal of G-6.0106b.

If PUP is adopted, including Recommendation 6, the 22 overtures should not be acted upon.

On suggestions of some about leaving the PC(USA) or declaring a “constitutional crisis.”

Recommendation 4 speaks to the need to “explore the use of alternative forms of discernment and decision-making as a complement to parliamentary procedure, especially in dealing with potentially divisive issues.” My concern is that a winner-takes-all parliamentary approach is against the spirit of PUP and would thus have the potential to further divide us.

I hope PUP passes by an overwhelming majority. If, however, PUP passes by only a narrow margin, I fear that many will perceive that ratification by the presbyteries was inten-

tionally by-passed in order to achieve victory. If we attend GA with the idea of winning, if we attend GA believing that PUP “must” or “must not” pass, we will be deaf to the Holy Spirit and the Church of Jesus Christ will be the big loser.

If PUP passes by a super-majority, I shall see it as the work of the Holy Spirit and, if elected Moderator, I will be its strong supporter. If PUP passes by a narrow majority, I shall seek the spirit of Recommendation 4, so that we can agree on a process of discernment and decision-making that allows us to leave the Assembly more united than we are today.

On divestment from some corporations doing business in ways that support the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and Palestinian acts of terrorism.

The PC(USA) must develop a consistent ethic both for investment and divestment; modern market capitalism requires such responsibility. At the same time, we are called to realize that justice transcends economics. Scripture teaches us that justice is relational... and that requires long, hard and tedious work. This is the work of reconciliation that confronts Palestinians and Israelis.

The unintended consequence of the 216th General Assembly action on divestment has been to hurt our relationship with the Jewish community, which understands our action as punitive rather than restorative. The Jewish community believes that it alone was singled out and that our failure to condemn militant Islamic extremism is a grievous omission.

At this point, the divestment issue with Israel should be rescinded. Israel does have a biblical theology of responsibility to the alien and marginalized that morally obligates its participation in seeking a peace with justice, and it is difficult to imagine, however, that divestment can serve to enable Israel’s moral obligations.

On U.S. use of torture.

William Sloane Coffin (*Credo*, pg. 20) tells the story of a beggar in 16th century Paris who, desperately ill, was about to be operated upon by a group of doctors. One of the doctors, certain that his patient did not understand Latin, said,



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Candidates for Moderator respond (cont.)

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On U.S. use of torture.

Our presbytery unanimously passed a Presbyterian Initiative Against Torture overture. We hope that the Assembly will support this call for action and awareness and add its voice to our concern.

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tunity to witness to our faith in God as Creator, Jesus Christ as Prince of Peace, and the Holy Spirit as the “Breath of Life.” I believe the General Assembly, consistent with our current policy, should:

- continue to affirm the honorable performance of our military in the rebuilding of Iraq and the security of the United States of America
- urge our governmental officials to develop safe-guards that will help prevent torture and abuse of prisoners
- declare that valuing human life by maintaining the dignity and just treatment of our prisoners is consistent with the Gospel found in Jesus Christ.

I would encourage the Assembly to maintain these current commitments.

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“Faciamus experimentum in anima vile.” (“Let us experiment on this vile fellow.”) The beggar, an impoverished student who would later become the renowned poet Marc Antoine Muret, replied from the slab on which they had placed him, “Animam vilem appellas pro qua Christus non dedignatus mori est?” (“Will you call vile one for whom Christ did not disdain to die?”).

Torture is wrong. Torture violates the Christ in us and the Christ in our neighbor. Torture not only dehumanizes those who are tortured but also the torturer. The General Assembly can say no less.



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Bible and taking seriously its central message for our lives.” Guideline #5 from the PC(USA) puts the central message this way: “Let all interpretations (of the Bible) be in accord with the rule of love, the two-fold commandment to love God and to love our neighbor.”

Jack writes: “When we interpret Scripture in a way that is hurtful to people, we can be sure that we are not glorifying God.” I think it is clear that the use of the Scripture in the debate over full inclusion of LGBT persons often fails to glorify God.

Jack takes on the topic of same-sex marriage because, as he writes, “the issue of ordaining people who are gay and lesbian is inextricably linked to the issue of marriage.” In other words, if same-sex marriage were permissible in the church, we could hold LGBT and straight clergy to the same ordination standard: faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness. Currently, LGBT folks in committed, long term, monogamous same-sex relationships are told that they must remain celibate if they wish to be ordained.

Jack not only highlights this inequity; he takes on the opposition to same-sex marriage in the broader society. His primary premise is that there is a strong link between opposition to equality between men and women and opposition to same-sex marriage, and his primary target is James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family. I’ll let you read the details yourself. Suffice it to say that Dobson fans will not be happy, but those in the other camp are in for an enjoyable read in Chapter 6.

Jack’s recommendations to the PC(USA) go well beyond removal of G-6.0106b; although his arguments for removal of this “flaw in the *Book of Order*” are certainly helpful. He calls for the amendment of G-4.0403, on Full Participation, to include persons of different sexual orientations. He recommends the correction of the answer to Question 87 of the Heidelberg Catechism after a convincing argument that the phrase “homosexual perversion” is not an accurate translation of any of the language in the original document. (This correction was sought a few years ago, without success, by Johanna Bos and Christopher Elwood of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.) Jack raises the question: “How do we heal the church of this injustice [of failing to fully include LGBT persons] that has divided us?” He believes “that the first step is for all of us in the church to apologize, institutionally, collectively and personally.”

P.S. With the publication of *Jesus, the Bible and Homo-*

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The 2006 Ghost Ranch Seminar

See what's coming, and learn what you've been missing for the past 5 summers!

This July will be the eighth year the Witherspoon Society has sponsored a seminar at Ghost Ranch in partnership with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation. Current issues concerning the economy, ecology and empire will be the topics for discussion and discernment from a biblical perspective.

I highly recommend books written by two of the leaders for this seminar to anyone interested in current national policies and how they relate to the moral teachings of the Bible. Barbara Rossing's *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* and Walter Owensby's *Economics for Prophets: A Primer on Concepts, Realities, and Values in our Economic System* both shed needed light on the subjects they cover.

Rossing's book deals with one of the Bible's most complex books, the book of Revelation, and the way both domestic and foreign policies have been impacted by a false and unbiblical interpretation of its powerful metaphors. She analyzes the best-selling, extremely popular *Left Behind* series, pointing out the distortions and destructiveness of the visions of a 'rapture' and 'count-down to Armageddon.' That thousands of born-again Christians adhere to this interpretation of Revelation has an immense influence on U.S. policy in the Middle East. She argues for Revelation's vision of God's love and redemption, written as hope in the midst of Roman imperialism. Her plea is for the need

to reclaim the heart of the Bible's Christ-centered call for justice.

Although published in 1988, Owensby's primer on economics is as timely as ever. Some of the statistics, if updated, would expose an even bleaker picture of the unjust impacts of present economic policies. He begins with common perceptions of how the economy works, then exposes how these theoretical beliefs are in contrast to the reality of people's lives. Each chapter begins with basic concepts of our economic system, its effect on people both domestically and internationally, then raises theological questions about its function from a biblical/ethical perspective. He demonstrates the relationship between economic and social realities, how resources are allocated and for whose benefit. This is not a book about comparative economic systems nor a blueprint for an alternative. Because it is the system under which we live, Owensby elucidates our specific Christian responsibility to understand, criticize and transform aspects that harm people and societies.

Each of the years our organizations have been sponsoring seminars at Ghost Ranch, we have been blessed by outstanding presenters. Quite a few have written books that make important contributions to our better understanding of the forces at work in today's world, particularly from a theological perspective.

Mark Taylor, Princeton Theological Seminary professor, has written

numerous books, the most recent published last fall, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right*, was reviewed in the last issue of *Network News* (Winter 2006). Dr. Taylor will be leading a Semper Reformanda Conversation at General Assembly, sponsored by Witherspoon.

Also published last year, *Come Together Right Now: Organizing Stories from a Fading Empire* by Bruce K. Gagnon, Coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space. When Gagnon met with us in 2002 we were awakened to U.S. plans for weaponizing and controlling global activity from space, even to anticipating conducting wars from space. In his recent book, Gagnon traces his journey from a Republican for Nixon and his joining the U.S. Air Force to becoming a leading opponent of U.S. intentions for space. Helen Caldicott describes him as "one of the more noble people on the planet today, one who is devoting his life to saving the Earth." In telling his story, Gagnon inspires and urges readers to become activists for peace and gives succinct suggestions for how to join the movement toward a world of compassion that respects the dignity of every person. (Books can be ordered from Global Network www.space4peace.org)

Ched Meyers, Ross and Gloria Kinsler, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, Barbara Green, Alan Geyer, Joseph Gerson, Carol Johnston and Anne Barstow, all some of our presenters in previous years, have also written books of important significance. Check them out on the Internet.

Jane Hanna

For details, see next page.

Ghost Ranch Seminar—July 17-24, 2006

ECONOMY, ECOLOGY AND EMPIRE

In partnership with The Witherspoon Society, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation (Jane Hanna, Coordinator)

For two weeks in the summer of 2004, four hundred delegates to the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches gathered in Accra, Ghana, adopting a statement of confession and commitment to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth. During our week at Ghost Ranch we will examine the realities of our world that have made this statement necessary.

We live in a time much like that of the Roman Empire into which Jesus and the church were born. How should people of faith respond to the root causes of massive threats to life that result from an unjust economic system supported by political and military might? We will consider our individual commitment to giving time, energy and gifts to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth.

Resources will be available to assist us in taking the message to our congregations that in community we can work for economic and ecological justice in our local and regional settings as well as global.

(To read the statement “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth” and the Letter from Accra, go to the WARC website:

http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=181&part_id=0&navi=1)

Attention will be given to the Book of Revelation, written to give hope to the oppressed during the Roman Empire, not as a prophecy for the end of the world. The week will be a time for reflection on God's sovereignty over all life and all the earth, to our deep connection to all that is.

Our Seminar leaders:

Dr. Barbara R. Rossing, ordained Lutheran minister and Professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She works on issues of Bible, ecology and empire. Her most recent book, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* was featured on “Sixty Minutes” as a critique of the fundamentalist “Left Behind” novels. She was one of the principal authors of the Bible Studies, “For the Healing of the World,” at the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Winnipeg in 2003. She holds an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School and a Th.D. from Harvard Divinity School.

Dr. Walter Owensby served for 16 years in the PCUSA Washington Office as an advocate on economic and international affairs. A Presbyterian minister, he holds an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin with studies in international development. His dissertation dealt with U.S. corporate investment in Mexico. He is the author of *Economics for Prophets: A Primer on Concepts, Realities, and Values in our Economic System*. He has served as a parish minister, a teacher of biblical and theological materials in Mexico, and headed an ecumenical program in Colombia focused on the social impact of foreign corporations and governments.

Gary Cook serves as Associate Director in the PC(USA) Worldwide Ministries Division and is responsible for the Global Service and Witness program area, which includes programs focused on international health, hunger, disaster relief, and development. Prior to 2004, he was the coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program. He currently also chairs the PC(USA) Globalization staff team, convenes the Reformed communions' Globalization Working Group, and serves on the National Council of Churches' task force on a 21st Century Social Creed. He is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and Chicago Theological Seminary and served congregations in Ohio and Florida before joining the PC(USA) national staff in 1991.

For more information, contact Jane Hanna, mjhfos@aol.com.

“Bless Your Heart”

a special report on the TAMFS national conference, from Kenneth Smith, president of the Witherspoon Society

“You’re going to the TAMFS National Conference outside of Atlanta in March? Well, bless your heart.” My heart was indeed blessed by this gathering of about 135 folks from across the country; gay and straight, young and old, old friends and new.

The heart theme carried over into some excellent preaching! Anna Carter Florence’s title was “Pondering Hearts” as she preached on Luke 2:41-52, the account of the 12-year-old Jesus at the Temple and his parents’ search for him. Nelson Johnson preached on “Troubled Hearts” – “Do not let your hearts be troubled ...” John 14:1. Four LGBT inquirers/candidates under care shared the preaching time on “Blessed Hearts” using the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-11. The final sermon on Sunday morning was by Larry Owens and entitled “Burning Hearts,” based on two disciples’ encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 25:13-34).

I want to highlight a pre-conference workshop entitled “Mending Hearts,” which was led by Nelson Johnson, Director of the Beloved Community in Greensboro, NC, and Lisa Larges and Mieke Vandersall of TAMFS. This workshop helped make connections between our stories of race and sexuality. I really want to thank TAMFS for their work in linking racism and heterosexism. It is very helpful in the movement toward a more inclusive church and a good reminder to those of us who are persons of privilege in relation to both of these “isms.”

This related well to one of the two concurrent workshops I attended during the conference itself. Entitled “Sharing Your Heart,” it provided some good counsel on being a straight ally. Chuck Campbell of Columbia Seminary, and a fellow white male straight ally, provided the following list of what we need to be about: listening, being visible, naming the power structure that is in place, and remembering that the ordination of LGBT folks is not “an issue,” it’s about people.

My second concurrent workshop on “Transforming Hearts” addressed my favorite topic (I’m not kidding): working on pertinent overtures coming to General Assembly. There was a good overview of the overtures of interest to LGBT folks and their allies, but the major conversation was about the report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church, affectionately known as the PUP Report. In both sessions of this workshop, we went around the room and shared our own views on the PUP Report and, in some cases, the views of our organization. We were not of one mind! This is not surprising, but I was surprised by the almost unanimous support of inquirers and candidates under care for the PUP recommendation for an authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108. They clearly saw the passage of this recommendation as helpful on their journey toward ordination and were troubled that some did not see this position as “politically correct.” I felt as a straight ally this was something I needed to listen to.

Continued from Rogers, page 33

sexuality in March, 2006, with its recommendations to the PC(USA), I could not resist setting Jack’s recommendations along side those from the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church (TTF). As an advocate for full inclusion of LGBT persons in the life of our church, I would find it easy to say that Jack’s recommendations are the ones that the TTF should have made. However, that is not how the TTF perceived its call. The TTF felt called to look at how persons in the PC(USA) could live in harmony with one another in the face of difficult issues on which we disagree. Jack felt called to help heal our differences around the difficult issue of full inclusion of LGBT persons. These calls and recommendations are not in conflict with one another! We need to live together in harmony, even when we differ, and we need to make the changes in church law so that the healing of our differences around full inclusion of all God’s children can proceed.



Remember, for news and views during General Assembly, you’re invited to visit us on the Witherspoon site at www.witherspoon.society.org

and don’t forget the new shared site created by More Light Presbyterians, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Covenant Network, That All May Freely Serve, Voices of Sophia, and The Witherspoon Society. Just go to www.justpresbys.org

A progressive looks anew at the Christian faith

John R. Preston, *Wrestling until Dawn: the Fight for Biblical Justice in a Postmodern World* (Spiritbrook Press, Holland Patent, NY, 2006)

a review by Jane Hanna

I met John Preston last summer when he came to our PPF, Witherspoon, PRC sponsored seminar at Ghost Ranch. Our new friendship honored me with an opportunity to read his pre-published draft and now to respond to the book in print. What began as a personal quest for understanding how his faith could speak to the moral issues of our time led over six years to this timely book.

The breadth of Preston's research is impressive. He summarizes very well the findings of modern scientific and biblical scholars to cast new light on traditional scriptural narratives. Preston uses the biblical story of Jacob's night-long wrestling match as a metaphor for the struggle

he has experienced in using traditional theology for meeting the challenges of our time. He offers his struggle and discoveries to others who seek a prophetic and honest faith that is relevant in light of today's moral issues.

Preston contends that we must discover a new theological lens for developing an effective response to the call for justice and peace. Too often theology has supported and justified slavery, racism, colonialism, wars, imperialism, homophobia, sexism, and a host of other unjust systems. Our traditional biblical and civic narratives are not sufficient for opposing militarism, nationalism, commercialism, genocide, poverty and environmental devastation.

The biblical and scientific studies Preston cites offer a deeper understanding of God's intent for the well being of all. His is a call to reinterpret our religious traditions to free us from the American myth and better prepare us for meeting the spiritual and social challenges of our modern world.

Available for purchase on the web, \$19.95

www.lulu.com/spritbrookpress

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For our Membership meeting, Sunday, June 18, following the Witherspoon Awards Luncheon

One of our most important tasks at the Membership Meeting, during the General Assembly, will be to consider the new By-Laws that were published in the Winter 2006 issue of *Network News*.

We are proposing some important changes, primarily to adapt to the new biennial Assemblies, but also to make other improvements.

In the meeting, amendments may be offered and considered. And if you can't be there but want to suggest changes, we invite you to contact our president, Ken Smith.

If you have questions or concerns or suggestions, please pass them along to Ken, too. You'll find his contact information on the back cover of this newsletter.

Because our last election was held at our annual meeting two years ago, and all terms are limited to two years, all of our current officers' terms are expiring.

The slate of nominees for the coming two years is not yet complete, but will be presented to those present at the Membership Meeting on June 18. Further nominations will be received from the floor, but our Nominating Committee will welcome suggestions before that time.

The offices to be filled, if the new By-Laws are approved, will be:

- Co-Moderators (two)
- Membership Coordinator
- Treasurer
- Secretary/Communicator
- Issues Analyst
- Members at Large (at least four)

For a description of the responsibilities for each of these positions, please see pages 33-34 in the Winter 2006 *Network News*.

The Nominating Committee will welcome your suggestions – and it's just fine to suggest yourself! **So please send us your nominations!**

Just copy or clip this form, and send it to the chair of the Nominating Committee
 Heather Shortlidge
 3319 Hixson Pike, Chattanooga, TN 37415
 or send an e-mail to
 hshortlidge@hotmail.com
 or call (423) 877-8527

To the Nominating Committee of the Witherspoon Society

I would like to suggest for the office of

My name:

(office)

How to contact me:

Phone: _____

(name)

E-mail: _____

Could you say a bit about why you're suggesting this person?

(address)

(phone)

(e-mail)

The
Next
Network
News

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

We hope you'll stop by our booth in the Exhibit Hall, or join in one or more of our public events (see page 4).

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

**Deadline for submissions
is
July 20, 2006**

Please let us hear from you!

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to join us!**

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community of progressive
Presbyterians,
witnessing and working
for peace and justice in
God's world,
we can help provide you
with information,
theological reflection, and
companionship on the
journey.**

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

**John E. Harris
77 Boggess Street
Buckhannon, WV 26201
H - 304-473-1929
E-mail: membershipcoordinator@
witherspoonsociety.org**

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- _____ **copies of this issue**
- _____ copies of the Winter 2006 issue, including articles on torture and violence, Palestine, the aftermath of Katrina, and Doug Ottati on "The Union's Interesting State"
- _____ copies of the Summer 2005 issue, with comments on the Theological Task Force report, and a report on the Network of Spiritual Progressives
- _____ copies of the Spring 2005 issue, with the Accra statement on "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth"
- _____ copies of the Winter 2005 issue, on challenging the idols of nation and empire

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

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

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

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My check to "Witherspoon Society" is enclosed

Name: _____

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Phone: _____
(in case of questions)

Return this form to:
Doug King, editor
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