

The Other Inconvenient Truth: The Growing Gap between Rich and Poor



The Editor's Spot



Seeking ways to confront torture

by Doug King

Spending three days talking about torture may not sound like much fun. It's not. But about sixty people came together at Columbia Theological Seminary, in Decatur, Georgia, from February 3 through 5, to do just that. Nearly half the participants were students, mostly at Presbyterian-related colleges and seminaries. All of us were looking for ways to act against something that seems to betray all we believe in about the way Jesus' followers are called to live, and about the values of the United States.

The meeting was held with one specific goal: finding ways to help Presbyterian congregations deal with an urgent issue which most of them seem determined to avoid.

The conference began Sunday evening by plunging into the lived reality of torture: We heard harrowing presentations, the first being from Lucy Mashua, who was a victim of female genital mutilation and torture in her native Kenya, and is now a refugee in asylum in the U.S. The second was by Eric Fair, who served in the U. S. Army as a linguist, and after that was sent to Iraq with a private contractor, interrogating detainees using "enhanced interrogation techniques" such as sleep deprivation, that were approved in the Army manual. He did that for a short time, until "after three or four hours I had to stop," because his spirit rebelled so strongly at what he was being ordered to do.

Continued on page 15

In this issue:

Mind the Gap!

The Other Inconvenient Truth: The Growing Gap between Rich and Poor

The world isn't just getting warmer, it's getting more deeply divided between rich and poor.

We began discussing the need to dedicate an issue of *Network News* to this topic in a Board meeting back in April of 2007. The economy had not yet begun to tank but there were ample signs that all was not well and would probably get worse. Since that initial discussion, it has become clear that the gap is not so much between the rich and poor as it is between the rich and everyone else. And the gap is not just a matter of wealth, it's also a growing differential in power, as labor unions and other structures that have helped balance the rich-poor differential are being attacked and weakened.

Limitless profit for the limited few threatens everyone – even the limited few – and so we find ourselves being challenged to embrace the theology we have proclaimed for decades. We are challenged to breach class divides and truly live together, rather than waving at each other from opposite sides of the canyon.

These are not new questions, but much of our own Presbyterian history has either been lost or never learned. Our hope is that this issue contains enough about the past to make you proud, enough about the present situation to alarm you, and enough about the future to give you hope.

by Trina Zelle and Doug King

Cover photo: Students and workers call on Arizona State University president to follow code of ethics in requiring fair treatment of workers by sub-contractors.

NETWORK NEWS (ISSN 0745-418X) is published quarterly at Decatur, GA, and additional entry offices, by **The Witherspoon Society** of the Presbyterian Church (USA), 2800 White Oak Drive, Decatur, GA 30032-4346
Subscription: Free to members, \$40 per year for non-members.
Periodicals postage paid at Decatur, GA.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Network News, Douglas King, 2800 White Oak Drive, Decatur, GA 30032-4346.

Witherspoon events at the 218th General Assembly

Friday, June 20, 1:00 to 3:30 pm

Semper Reformanda Pre-Assembly Conversation

(sponsored by the Witherspoon Society)

This is an occasion for progressive Presbyterians to gather informally as they begin to arrive for the General Assembly, to talk about issues coming to the Assembly and other concerns. Special speakers will include Rita Nakashima Brock and Noelle Damico.

Dr. Brock has written extensively on issues of justice, including human trafficking in Southeast Asia. She will touch on themes discussed in her forthcoming book (with Rebecca Parker) entitled *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. Pre-publication copies of the book should be available.

Noelle Damico is director of the Presbyterian Hunger Program's Fair Food campaign, and the PC(USA)'s liaison with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in their campaign for improved wages and working conditions in Florida's tomato fields.

Ramada Hotel "Upper Room,"

455 S. 2nd Street, San Jose

Tickets will be free for TSADs. For others: \$15.

Saturday, June 21, 7:00-9:00am

Commissioners' Orientation Breakfast

This breakfast meeting is offered especially for GA commissioners and others who will be involved in the Assembly. Brief presentations will be given on the many important issues coming before the Assembly – analyzing them from a progressive point of view.

It will also give you a good chance to get acquainted with other commissioners.

The event is free for commissioners and advisory delegates. Others may order tickets through the General Assembly ticket service, at \$15.

Ramada Hotel "Upper Room,"

455 S. 2nd Street, San Jose

Sunday, June 22, 1:00-3:00 pm

Witherspoon Awards Luncheon

The keynote speaker is Carol Hovis, who is the Executive Director of the Marin Interfaith Council and an ordained Presbyterian Minister, member of Redwoods Presbytery. Out of her experience she will address the intersection of interfaith relationships and peace & justice advocacy.

The Andrew Murray Award will be presented to the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, an outstanding leader of the Presbyterian Church (USA), as he retires as Stated Clerk. The Whole Gospel Congregation Award will be given to a congregation in the Bay Area.

Convention Center Ballroom

Tickets \$45

Tuesday, June 24, 9:00pm-1:00am

Witherspoon Party and Dance!

Time for a break! This is a great chance to relax and enjoy great music, dancing and conversation – and an informal place to meet and mingle with others at the Assembly.

Convention Center Ballroom

Tickets \$20

Finding the "Upper Room" is easy. It is at the Ramada Limited, where most of the Witherspoon board members will be staying, at 455 South 2nd Street, about a five minute walk from the Convention Center. Just go north-east on San Salvador St., just across Market Street from the Convention Center. Turn right on Second St., and go about a half block southeast. The Ramada Inn will be on your left; the stairs to the Upper Room are toward the far end of the complex.

Ticket prices for the various events are not yet available, but they will be published in the GA Program Book, and we will post them on our website and publish them in the next issue of *Network News*.

Tickets can be ordered from the G. A. Ticket Service. They prefer that you order on-line at www.pcusa.org/ga218. Or you can call 888-728-7228, ext. 2417. You do *not* have to register in order to buy tickets.

Letter from Arizona

by Trina Zelle, Witherspoon Society Co-Moderator,
and Lead Organizer and Director of Interfaith Worker
Justice of Arizona

The man on the other end of the phone line was a Presbyterian elder, a retired engineer from one of our more conservative churches downstate. His call to my organization, Interfaith Worker Justice of Arizona, came as something of a surprise. More typically, I hear from construction workers whose bosses have refused to provide water despite the Arizona heat, labor organizers confirming a speaking engagement at a local church, or a community activist, inviting me to an upcoming action.

Dave had another purpose. His son had been killed the previous year, burned to death in a foundry accident, his upper body trapped by a furnace door that unexpectedly dropped. Dave and his wife had just been informed by OSHA (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) that what they had thought was a tragic accident was actually the result of willful negligence. The safety latch on the furnace door had been removed. There were previous citations of the owner for the same violation. Even so, the penalty was limited to a \$5,000 fine paid to OSHA and burial expenses for their son. In addition, Arizona law prohibits an employee or their survivors from suing their employer for negligence unless they opt out of Workers' Compensation upon hire. I have never spoken to a worker who recalls being presented with this option.

"I want to make sure that this never happens to any other family. Can your organization help me?" he asked.

Dave and his wife Helen were in a daze when we first met, but have since become actively involved in some of our projects, including outreach to immigrant construction workers. They are determined both to find justice for their son and a way to prevent what happened to them from

happening to others. They understand the vulnerability of workers in our state and the truth that no one is safe until everyone is.

At some point, we will prevail. But, as the song says, the journey is long.

Life isn't very good here for working people, or many places in the United States for that matter. Employees are routinely denied bathroom breaks, safety equipment, or water on the job (even though it is required by Arizona law). They often experience wage theft – underpayment for hours worked – and failure to receive overtime for more than forty hours of work. If they attempt to organize into a union, they are summarily fired. Legal protections are no longer honored, conventional wisdom notwithstanding.

Why does this happen? Because employers face few penalties if actually caught. In other words, they do it because they can. In addition, many employers use the domestic version of outsourcing to distance themselves from direct responsibility – they subcontract. Contractors contract out work to subcontractors who, themselves, proceed to subcontract even further down the line. It is not unusual for a worker to be unable to identify anyone higher than their immediate

supervisor who takes their time card, gives them their paycheck and tells them to "shake it off" if they are injured on the job.

This shabby treatment is not limited to workers engaged in manual labor. School districts are privatizing support services including secretaries, custodians, security guards – pretty much anyone besides teachers and administrators. Subcontractors tend not to offer benefits, or job security. There are no grievance procedures. Pay is lower than it would be if these employees were part of the teachers' union (which includes support staff).

But subcontracting is nothing compared to the privatization of public functions that is changing our nation in ways that we don't yet understand. Every day in Arizona, white Wackenhut buses barrel down Interstate 10, transporting undocumented immigrants to Nogales, Mexico. Private



Trina Zelle (left) and others from Interfaith Worker Justice accompany striking iron workers calling on Dial Corp. to press Great Western Erector, a construction firm, to improve treatment of their workers.

prisons house indigenous prisoners from Hawaii and Alaska. The infamous “wall” to be built on our border will be contracted (and subcontracted) to private builders as will the production and installation of security equipment, and personnel hired to supplement a struggling border patrol. It would come as no surprise to me that, when all the public funds have been depleted in the implementation of private security strategies, our artificial immigration crisis will disappear. A solution will be found, which will surely include the subcontracted hiring of immigrant “guest” workers whose presence in the country will be contingent on staying with a particular employer. Demands for improved working conditions, or attempts to organize, will be met with deportation.

Two years ago, after twenty five years in parish ministry, I took a position organizing an affiliate of Interfaith Worker Justice in Arizona. In addition to close relationships with local faith communities, I have also found what I refer to as my new faith community – workers, labor organizers and immigrants’ rights activists. Most of these folks are the kind of people any minister would be thrilled to have as members. They work tirelessly to improve the lives of working men and women and to defend the rights of immigrants, who are, as previously mentioned, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. They are on the front line of human rights the way clergy were during the civil rights era. In my opinion, they are the ones holding the line against the total demolition of the New Deal and what decent living standards remain.

How can faith leaders and people of faith help?

Realize how important your voice is and use it for justice. Currently, the silence from the dominant culture faith community is deafening when it comes to immigrant and worker rights. Educate yourself about the bigger picture. Read up on the history of the labor movement in the United States, especially as it relates to the struggle for immigrant and civil rights, and understand the importance of its role in middle class security and comfort. We all remember the Grover Norquist quote about reducing the size of the federal government so that it can be drowned in a bathtub. His other quote doesn’t get publicized as much: “We’re going to crush labor as a political entity.” In other words, he and his allies want to silence the voices of the people whose labor is responsible for this nation’s prosperity, and so render them powerless. If someone else signs your paycheck, that includes you, no matter what honorific might precede your name.

Examine the hiring policies of your own congregation. Do you contract out any of the work that is done around the

church – generally maintenance or lawn care? Do you use a linen service? Are you about to enlarge your sanctuary or refurbish the fellowship hall? If so, have you adopted a code of ethics regarding your hiring practices? Do you require any private firms you hire to abide by them as well?

Globalization has changed many things, but it does not need to be an occasion for the rollback of hard won rights for working people. The growing divide between rich and poor is neither inevitable nor necessary. Limitless profit for the limited few is not acceptable.

People of faith and conscience have changed the tone and outcome of the national conversation on a variety of topics, numerous times. It’s time to put on our walking shoes and do it again.

*Plan now to join in a major
Ghost Ranch event
this summer!*

July 28 - August 3, 2008

Paths toward Peace and Justice:

**Spirituality, Earth-Care,
and the Prophetic Word
in a time of Violence**

details on page 19

Save money by registering early

Presbyterians Advocate Worker Justice

By Kim Bobo

Executive Director, Interfaith Worker Justice

Presbyterians have long been on the forefront of fighting hunger and poverty in the nation. The Presbyterian Washington Office is known for its advocacy for ethical welfare reform, expansion of food and housing resources, and fair jobs policies. The Presbyterian Hunger Program has supported thousands of education and advocacy programs around the nation. Self-Development of People has supported low-income persons who organize to challenge economic disparities.

Despite endeavors like this, the rate of people living in poverty is increasing, disparities between rich and poor are growing, and long-term societal trends suggest no change from that trajectory. Poverty isn't a temporary condition which changes once a person is employed – impoverished families tend to have at least one adult who works full time. “Working poor” has become a common and acceptable term as recent studies suggest that over half of the new jobs being created are poverty zone jobs, meaning that the jobs pay minimum wage or just a few dollars above.

In response to these trends, Presbyterians are joining with other people of faith to seek new and more effective ways to challenge poverty jobs and improve wages, benefits and working conditions for low-wage workers.

Partnerships with Labor

Founded in 1996, Interfaith Worker Justice starts with the premise that partnership with the labor movement is essential for challenging poverty.

Some may ask why people of faith would want to work with unions. Consider the 7,000 Chicago workers employed by downtown hotels owned by major chains. Until the summer of 2002, Chicago's hotel workers were among the lowest paid for any major convention city. Health care was offered but not affordable. Many of the workers and their families lived in poverty because of low wages and poor benefits. The workers, represented by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), met for months to clarify what they needed and wanted.

Eventually, the union and its worker negotiating team began meeting with hotel owners. Simultaneously, the workers and our Chicago affiliate began talking with congregations and community organizations about the need to improve conditions for hotel workers and the possibility that the workers might have to strike to get a good contract. Recognizing how close to the margin most workers lived, the religious and community organizations understood how difficult it would be for workers to consider going out on strike, so congregations and community organizations began collecting food and money in anticipation of a possible strike vote.

This broad-based community and religious support encouraged the workers. When negotiations stalled the workers voted 4,000 to five to go out on strike. Luckily for the workers and the businesses, a strike was averted. A contract agreement provided \$3 per hour raises, dramatically improved family health care

benefits, new grievance and work rules, and time off with pay for workers becoming citizens (an important symbolic victory for the many immigrant workers). This is an amazing improvement in the lives of 7,000 workers.

Or consider the janitors in Houston. Until the fall of 2006, 5,300 downtown janitors were making slightly more than minimum wage, had no health care and were only given part-time hours. They cleaned buildings owned by national firms. In unionized cities, janitors working for the same building owners earned up to twice as much, had health care benefits and full-time jobs. The Houston janitors decided to organize with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Community and religious leaders joined them in marches and prayer vigils. Eventually, they won a contract providing health care, full-time job protections and wages were doubled over the 24-month life of the contract.

Working in partnership with the labor movement, faith communities helped to lift 7,000 hotel workers and 5,300 janitors out of poverty.

Are unions really necessary?

Many people in the religious community wonder if unions are really necessary. Couldn't workers and employers just get along and share in the wealth produced by the companies?

While not all employees may need a union and some employers may share profits with workers, economic trends in society show a growing workforce characterized by low wages and negligible benefits, even in highly profitable industries. Given the seeming demise of a social contract between companies and their workers, and the stagnation of wages despite an increase in productivity,

workers are seeking ways to improve their wages, benefits and working conditions. Despite the obstacles to organizing (the U.S. has the weakest labor laws in the industrialized world), workers are seeking unions as a vehicle for challenging poverty and injustice. More than two-thirds of working Americans, 68 percent, say workplace rights need more protection today. Recent polls say that 54 percent of young workers and 36 percent of older workers would vote for a union if they could. Why?

Unionized workers have a voice in the workplace. Unions provide a counterbalancing power to management in the workplace, through a contract that outlines rules and procedures, and through a structure for addressing worker concerns. Workers can't always secure everything they want, but they are assured a more structured means for addressing problems.

Unionized workers earn more money and better benefits. Union workers earn 30 percent more than nonunion workers, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Their median weekly earnings for full-time wage and salary work were \$833 in 2006, compared with \$642 for their nonunion counterparts. The union wage benefit is even greater for minorities and women. Union women earn 31 percent more than nonunion women; African-American union members earn 36 percent more than their nonunion counterparts; for Latino workers, the union advantage is 46 percent; for Asian-American workers, the union advantage is eight percent. (Source: AFL-CIO website)

Unionized workers are more likely to have health insurance. Union members are also more likely to have health plans that include dental care, prescriptions, and eyeglass

coverage. Many unions are fighting to preserve or establish affordable co-payments for health insurance.

Unionized workers are more likely to have retirement benefits. Most union members, 80 percent, are covered by pension plans, compared with only 47 percent of nonunion workers. Beyond the specific benefits that unions offer individuals, it is important for those seeking justice in the society to understand and recognize the important role that unions have played in U.S. society at large.

Public Policy Advocates — Workers, especially low-wage workers, need a strong public policy voice that can counteract the powerful, well-financed business interests that too often dominate public policies. Many union members have bumper stickers that say, "The eight-hour day, brought to you by the union movement," which is true. Many of the public policies we take for granted, such as child labor laws, the eight-hour day, social security, pension protections, and the minimum wage were fought for and achieved primarily by the labor movement. The religious community was often involved in these fights, primarily as allies with the labor movement.

Raising the Wage Floor for All Workers — In 1954, unions represented 39 percent of the workforce. At the beginning of the 21st century, unions represent less than 10 percent of the private sector workforce. The decline of unions and their power is clearly a contributing cause to the overall decline of wages and benefits for all workers. In fact, between the mid-1940s and the early-1970s, when labor unions were at their strongest, wages kept pace with productivity; real wages rose consistently, union members gained higher wages through collective bargaining,

and the process benefitted all workers. Frequently even non-union employers raise wages to discourage union organizing and to retain good workers.

Challenging Gross Disparity of Wages — The ratio of CEO pay to worker pay in major U.S. companies is the most unequal of any industrialized nation in the world. In 2005, the average CEO in the United States earned 262 times the pay of the average worker, the second highest level of this ratio in the 40 years for which there are data. In 2005, a CEO earned more in one workday (there are 260 in a year) than an average worker earned in 52 weeks. (Source: Economic Policy Institute) U.S. CEO salaries are grossly excessive, compared to their average workers' salaries, because of a culture of greed and the decline of unions. Union bargaining tends not only to raise the bottom wages, but also to limit the growth of excessively high management wages, and to place some limits on CEO compensation. The effort to seek more equitable and just salaries within companies is best achieved by unions organized within companies.

Renewed Partnerships with Government Agencies require a Vision

When Francis Perkins served as the Secretary of Labor from 1933 to 1945, she often said, "I came to Washington to work for God, FDR, and the millions of forgotten, plain common workingmen." She brought a vision to the job and she implemented it. She stopped immigration workplace raids. She advocated the first minimum wage. She established child labor laws.

Today's crisis for working families requires a strong Department of Labor with visionary leadership. In this election year, Presbyterians should ask presidential candidates what they

are going to do to strengthen the Department of Labor and ensure visionary leadership so it can take on the challenges faced by working Americans.

Advocating for Worker-Friendly Public Policies

The Presbyterian Hunger Program has done a superb job of educating Presbyterians about the critical role that public policy plays in reducing hunger. Although there are dozens of important public policies, those listed below are priorities for Interfaith Worker Justice and its allied groups in 2008:

Paid Sick Days. Almost half of all private sector workers and 79 percent of low-wage workers do not have a single paid sick day. For those who do have paid sick days, 94 million workers cannot use their paid sick days to care for sick children. It is important to set a federal standard that employers should provide a basic number of sick days as part of a minimum package for workers and that these days should be eligible for caring for children. The Healthy Families ACT (S910 in the Senate and H.R. 1542 in the House of Representatives) would require employers with 15 or more employees to provide seven paid sick days per year to workers who work at least 30 hours per week. These sick days could be used for when the employee or his/her dependent is sick. This is a common sense approach that would raise wages and take some of the fear out of getting sick for low-wage families. For a bulletin insert for your congregation about the issue, visit www.iwj.org/materials/materials_fw.html.

Create a rational immigration program. The large number of undocumented immigrants in the country is bad for workers. Immigrants do important work, pay taxes,

and deserve fair pay and just treatment. Unfortunately, many unethical employers want to hire undocumented immigrants because they can be underpaid and exploited more easily, out of fear of deportation. The U.S. needs an immigration program that outlines an orderly way for immigrants in the country to become citizens, reunites divided families, and guarantees that all workers are protected by labor laws. Interfaith Worker Justice has been playing a national leadership role in supporting congregations providing sanctuary for immigrants, challenging unjust workplace raids and fighting the Social Security Administration's no-match letters. Ultimately, the nation needs a rational immigration program that is fair and humane. Presbyterians have developed a new network called Presbyterians For Just Immigration (PFJI) to connect Presbyterians interested in various immigration issues and how these issues impact their communities, churches and presbyteries. PFJI is committed to fostering discussion, sharing resources, promoting advocacy, and writing liturgy on various immigration topics. To join the network, call Dana Dages at 888-728-7228 x5202.

Challenging Wage Theft. Too many workers are having their wages stolen from them by unscrupulous employers. All 19 IWJ-affiliated workers centers routinely see workers who have not been paid for all the hours they work. Allowing unscrupulous employers to exploit groups of workers undermines standards and working conditions for all workers. Interfaith Worker Justice is working with congressional leaders to create a pilot program through which the Department of Labor would partner with workers centers to target particularly egregious industries and conduct aggressive educational outreach to workers in those industries.

Future Religious Leaders. The future for engaging the religious community lies with its future religious leaders, most of whom are in seminary. With a few exceptions, most seminaries don't adequately prepare future religious leaders to support workers in their congregations. Because of the importance of helping future religious leaders understand the issues facing low-wage workers and the important role of unions, Interfaith Worker Justice has partnered with labor unions to sponsor Seminary Summer, a program in which seminary students work with labor unions in summer internships. Students from three Presbyterian seminaries have participated. Outreach materials are available at all 10 Presbyterian seminaries. In 2008, Interfaith Worker Justice is publishing a *Worker Justice Reader*, a compilation of the best articles providing a broad overview of worker justice issues. The *Reader* is designed to be the primary text for a seminary course, or for use in a broader social justice course.

Broadening the Faith Base for Workers. The biggest challenge for bringing faith to work for workers is finding ways to engage congregations in a more significant way. Congregations have few structures in place to educate workers about their rights, challenge companies to be ethical employers, advocate with elected leaders about just policies, and support low-wage workers who seek to improve wages, benefits and working conditions. If the religious community is going to bring its religious values to bear for workers, it must find new ways for engaging members of congregations. Interfaith Worker Justice has created a pilot congregational program in which the organization is working with the congregation to increase its education and advocacy

on worker justice issues. We send out a monthly e-newsletter designed for congregations, and we develop and distribute special resources. If your congregation would like to be a part of this pilot program, please contact Shawna Tuttle at stuttle@iwj.org.

Put Your Faith to Work for Workers. As people of faith, Christians, Jews and Muslims believe their religious traditions and Scriptures call them to be involved in seeking justice for workers. Given the rapid increase in families supported by parents in low-wage jobs, the religious community must find new ways to support workers, challenge employers, advocate with elected officials, and bring an ethical voice to economic life. Luckily, there are lots of things people can do. Here are a few:

1) **Link up with a local interfaith religion-labor group in your community.** The local organization will have the best handle on local worker struggles that need your support. Find the list of groups at www.iwj.org/outreach/lg.html.

2) **Engage your congregation in worker issues.** Review some of the following resources, all of which can be found at www.iwj.org:

- *Worker Rights Bulletin Inserts.* These inserts are particularly effective if the congregation has low-wage and immigrant workers in it.
- *Establishing an Ethic for Worker Justice, an Assessment Tool for Congregations.* This is an excellent tool for helping a congregation assess its own employment and purchasing practices.
- *Building Projects and Religious Values.* This is a good resource for a congregation that is considering a building project.
- *Presbyterian Labor Day Resources.* This resource packet, updated in 2008, can help your

congregation lift up worker justice issues over Labor Day weekend.

3) **Become an advocate for just policies for workers.** The local religion-labor group can help you identify local policies for which to advocate. Interfaith Worker Justice can help you advocate for just national public policies. Sign-up for the e-mail action alert network and download current public policy information from www.iwj.org.

4) **Pray for workers, employers and elected leaders.** The Bible tells us to pray without ceasing. Sometimes prayers are quiet connections with God. Sometimes prayers may be outside an unjust employer's business. All prayers are important. *To learn more about putting your faith to work for workers, visit the Interfaith Worker Justice website at www.iwj.org and join the organization to receive its congregational resources in Faith Works, IWJ's quarterly newsletter.*

The author:

Kim Bobo, who is the national Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice, is a member of a local (storefront) United Church of Christ in Chicago, where she also serves as their choir director. She is also co-author of *Organizing for Social Change*.

Kim will be leading, along with Trina Zelle, one of the seminars in the Ghost Ranch Week for Peace, July 28 – August 3, 2008. The topic of the seminar will be “Faith, Workers and Economic Justice.” (See p. 19.)

“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.

A Hermeneutical Dialogue About Latin America

by Gene TeSelle, Witherspoon Society Issues
Analyst

Bartolomé de las Casas, the Dominican friar who followed Columbus to the New World, became bishop of Chiapas, wrote bold attacks on the behavior of the *conquistadores*, and defended the “Indians” in a formal debate, lasting several years, about colonial policy back in Spain. This was almost the only such debate to be conducted anywhere by a colonial power. He was converted to this concern by a passage in Ecclesiasticus, one of the books in the Apocrypha (Sirach 34:20-22). It reads this way in the RSV:

*Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes
is the man who offers a sacrifice
from the property of the poor.*

*The bread of the needy is the life of the poor;
whoever deprives them of it is a man of blood.*

*To take away a neighbor's living is to murder him;
to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood.*

We in the U.S. may not feel that this passage affects us. Las Casas belongs, after all, to the colonial past. His book on the mistreatment of the Indians was published by the Protestant powers and quickly became part of the “black legend” that besmirched Spanish colonialism. Simon Bolivar and the Monroe Doctrine ended all that. We have been able to offer our sacrifices and build our church edifices with clean hands and pure hearts.

But wait. We are the ones who engaged in gunboat diplomacy all over Latin America and the Caribbean, took over several governments to “manage” them better during the first few decades of the twentieth century, and encouraged corporations to invest throughout those regions. We are the ones who overthrew the governments of Guatemala and Chile when major corporations began to feel frustrated, established the School of the Americas to train their military men in counter-insurgency warfare and maintain liaison with U.S. personnel, and taught the “contras” in Nicaragua how to engage in terrorism.

The relationship need not be overtly violent. Economic exploitation is less visible and can even appear to be nothing

more sinister than the activity of a providential “invisible hand.” The approval of NAFTA in 1993 (which Congress would have opposed if the President had still been a Republican, but let Bill Clinton and Al Gore persuade them was a good thing) involved changes to the Mexican constitution that silently devastated local economies and forced people to seek work in the cities, or in the maquiladora zone just south of the Border, or wherever they could find it in the U.S.

Being good Protestants, furthermore, we have forgotten how Ambrose and John Chrysostom spoke frankly about wealth as robbery. (Of course good Catholics usually forget all of that, too, and recent popes, despite their many good words coming out of the tradition of Catholic social thought, have consistently thrown their weight on the side of existing economic and political power.)

That is why it is good to be reminded in this passage of the many places in the canonical Bible, recognized by Protestants, too, that call for justice to the worker. Sometimes they are an alarmingly accurate mirror of things happening in our own midst: squeezing workers to maximize profits; cutting wages and (when it is possible) withholding wages; exploiting “migrant” and “immigrant” workers; marketing predatory loans of many sorts (on cars, houses, household goods); replacing unionized meat processing factories with assembly-line plants that hire low-paid immigrants — a practice that has changed the face of many towns across the Midwest; deducting payroll taxes when immigrants are paid, but denying them public benefits and not letting their Social Security payments follow them back to Mexico.

We are even forgetting some parts of our own heritage in public policy. U.S. law explicitly prohibited the importation of short-term “contract labor” between 1885 and 1951. That is one reason why the plantation owners in Hawaii, who were busily trading in Chinese labor, did not want the islands to become a territory and instead set up an independent republic. An exception was made to the law in 1942 with the “bracero” program in the Southwest, as a wartime emergency measure. The program was formally repealed in 1964, and this helped Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers when they began organizing in the fields of California. But illegal employment of Mexican workers continued, and the administration now wants to make something like the bracero program a major part of the “solution” to the immigration issue.

There is plenty of biblical commentary on such practices.

You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners in your land, within your towns [get that: “within your towns”; it will seem increasingly familiar to many of us]; you shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down (Deut. 24:15; cf. Lev. 19:13).

When the sun goes down, you shall restore [the poor man] the pledge, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you (Deut. 24:13).

Justice to the sojourner is perhaps more frequently commanded than any other specific act:

You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex. 23:9; cf. 22:21; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19, 24:17).

Passages like these, of course, are likely to be viewed as idealistic, even hopelessly utopian. That criticism applies especially to the Jubilee, during which land holdings were to be returned to families that had needed to sell them because of economic stress (Lev. 25:8-55).

We are not naive. We have our allegorizers and our higher critics who help us understand the Bible’s place in the New Economic Dispensation. In this dispensation, selfishness is the only sure way to a dynamically growing economy; profit overcomes consideration of consequences; the “prudent man rule” requires corporate boards to place profit ahead of responsibility; stock market analysts on Wall Street and in-house MBAs are always pressuring corporations to perform more profitably; private equity firms are always ready to buy corporations, take them private, lay off employees, and put them back on the market leaner, capable of squeezing workers, suppliers, and the public more efficiently. Everything becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, enabling us to know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

We are told that the hardships of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and America were a necessary phase of economic growth, and that the same argument now applies to the newly industrializing economies of Mexico and Southeast Asia and China. If we balk, we are reminded of the principle of “comparative advantage,” which trumps everything else in current discourse. It is economically necessary, indeed, “good for the economy,” to set company against company, town against town, in competition with each other; to move factories (literally so – at least all the crucial equipment) to

Mexico; to invest in new factories in places with lower wages and fewer labor and environmental standards; to seek out new suppliers that will be even more productive; and to keep the supply relationships so complex and secretive that it will be impossible to carry out “independent monitoring” of the suppliers of our brand-name, logo-enhanced clothes and accessories.

Ancient Israel was aware of differences between rich and poor. The differences even seemed to be inevitable. But precisely at that point they were told that the appropriate response is not passive acceptance but ongoing social activity:

The poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land (Deut. 15:11).

Sometimes there was such a direct causal relationship that it drew special attention. The glories of affluence, they were told, are *not* worth the sacrifices of those who are underpaid.

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages (Jer. 22:13).

But what about those who are virtuous and honor God, and as a result have been rewarded with prosperity?

This Solomonic ethic is far from being the dominant theme in the Bible. In fact, it was an even worse abomination when sacrifices were offered with the fruits of exploitation. When sacrificial piety and acts of justice are put in the balance, one of them must yield.

They love sacrifice; they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but the Lord has no delight in them. Now he will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins (Hos. 8:13-14).

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6).

Under such circumstances there is a clear either/or:

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.



. . . . *But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*
(Amos 5:21-24).

There is, of course, another attitude toward the differences between pious worship and everyday life:

*When will the new moon be over,
that we may sell grain?
And the sabbath,
that we may offer wheat for sale,
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel
great,
and deal deceitfully with false balances,
that we may buy the poor for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and sell the refuse of the wheat? (Amos 8:5-6).*

Whether we have Sunday closing laws or not, whether “Judaean-Christian values” rule the society or not, there will be questions about the relation between religious commitments and economic life. The classic answer, shared by Catholics and Protestants, is that these are indeed different dimensions of human life that should not be confused with each other — and yet that they are related in many ways, with the result that nothing in economic life is irrelevant to personal devotion, and religious commitments are to make a significant difference to the way we deal with the shared realm of human interactions.



Men gather at memorial service for workers killed on the job during the past year.

Union Busting: A Growth Industry

by Joel Foster

Despite the classic images of “On the Waterfront,” the derogatory comments of pro-business politicians about “big labor,” and the ongoing speculation as to the location of Jimmy Hoffa’s remains, the reality for unions today is far different. Since the Reagan era the erosion of worker rights, including the right to organize, threatens the well-being, not only of the working class, but the middle class in the United States. Labor unions and the workers who make up their membership are the true “little guys,” caught between the myth of powerful union bosses and a popular mindset that is reflexively hostile to anything that might threaten corporate hegemony. A major reason for the current anti-labor climate is the little noticed but rapid and substantial growth of the anti-union industry, which exists to oppose the efforts of workers to form unions. Hundreds of consulting firms have made millions of dollars advising companies on how to undermine a unionization campaign. Chambers of Commerce and industry associations advise their members on tactics and strategies that have been used in other union busting campaigns.

Today’s anti-union activity differs dramatically from the club-wielding Pinkerton guards who put down the Homestead Strike in 1894, or the 1917 deportation of Arizona miners who were loaded onto boxcars that were then uncoupled and abandoned in southern New Mexico, far from any city or town. Now, in response to nearly every organizing effort, there are sophisticated strategies developed by paid consultants. Most of those efforts are similar to one another and typically involve three separate sets of union-busting activity: public relations, direct worker contact, and legal and political activity.

Nearly every major corporation has a multi-million dollar advertising and public relations budget, with union busting public relations as a very specific, and growing, niche within it. After years of being at the receiving end of innovative, often community led organizing campaigns in support of unions and workers — think the marches and peaceful direct action of Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers in the 1960’s or the Nestle boycott of the ’70s — most industries now aggressively attack labor unions in general as well as the specific union engaged in organizing their particular workers. Additionally, industries have been known to co-opt successful organizing tactics of the past to their own ends, for

example when anti-union California growers began staging their own “community” marches to oppose the efforts of the workers to form a union.

Besides the targeting of specific unions, an undisclosed group of trade organizations and individuals have funded “The Center for Union Facts.” The Center is run by Rick Berman, whose resumé includes the management of campaigns that range from promotion of the tobacco industry to opposition to recycling. Persons connected with The Center for Union Facts write letters to the editor and submit them to newspapers across the country, publish “fact sheets” on its website about labor unions and “big labor bosses,” and engage in lobbying activities. In May of 2006, the Center spent approximately \$3 million on a national ad campaign accusing labor unions in general of discriminating against minorities and using worker dues to create “fat cat lifestyles” for union leadership. Harley Shaiken, a labor and economics expert, identified the goal of the effort as simply being “(the creation of) an anti-union atmosphere.”

Corporations have also increased their anti-union activity through making direct contact with workers. Management-ordered mandatory meetings with “union experts” are increasingly common in workplaces where employees are trying to organize. “Educational” flyers are distributed that make allegations as to what unions will do if workers choose to join, inserting quotes from anti-union workers. Their most common and intimidating threat is the claim that the union will create such a financial hardship for the corporation that workers’ jobs will be jeopardized. These materials are presented to workers as providing a fair and balanced perspective on unions.

In industries that employ large numbers of immigrants – construction, agriculture, and tourism in particular – there have also been a rise in incidents of employees being threatened with regard to their immigration status. Sometimes those threats are direct; i.e. “If you support the union, we will report you to immigration authorities.” Sometimes there is the implication that workers unionizing will simply invite increased scrutiny from federal immigration authorities and other law enforcement. Within the last year there has been an increase in immigration raids taking place at large plants where an organizing effort is going on. There is a suspicion in the labor community that some of these raids have been carried out at the request of management, motivated by a desire to get rid of employees who are effective union organizers.

The third type of anti-union activity is conducted mostly in courtrooms and government offices. Corporations often file lawsuits against unions and their community supporters, claiming defamation of character and racketeering. Corporations invest large amounts of money in the lobbying of elected officials to pass anti-union laws and create anti-union regulations. For example, recent rulings from the National Labor Relations Board, dominated by Bush appointees, made it impossible for millions of workers to form unions by changing the federal definition of the term “supervisor,” even though their job responsibilities did not include actual supervisory duties.

Corporations have a long history of resisting the unionization of “their” workforce. When 39% of the workforce was unionized, this often took the form of matching the salaries and benefits of their unionized competition in order to reduce the desirability of going union. Now that the size of the union workforce hovers at 12%, many corporations see the opportunity to crush the union movement once and for all, reducing wages and rights to the point that outsourcing to low wage countries will no longer be necessary.

With millions of dollars spent in the creation of sophisticated campaigns, both public relations and political, to undermine the efforts of workers to organize, there is an increasing need to strengthen rather than further weaken the rights of workers. Working men and women should be able to choose freely whether or not they want a union, without being subjected to brainwashing or intimidation. Workers’ decisions should not be undermined by their employers. The right to form a union is still guaranteed by federal law, but only as long as people of faith and conscience fight to keep it that way.

The author:

Joel Foster is the Policy Director for United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 99, in Arizona, and a United Methodist.

It's Time for "The King" to Do the Right Thing

The Rev. Noelle Damico

On November 30, 2007 over 1,500 farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and consumers marched to Burger King headquarters in Miami, FL. Presbyterians were prominent among them. The action protested Burger King's role in contributing to poverty wages and modern-day slavery faced by farmworkers harvesting tomatoes for the fast-food and grocery industry. It intensified what has been a more than 2 year effort by the CIW and its allies, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to convince the fast-food giant to become a partner with the farmworkers in eradicating exploitative conditions in the fields.

Even as this mass march wound its way through the steamy streets of Miami, a seventh case of modern-day slavery was exposed in Immokalee, FL. Farmworkers were held against their will in locked trucks, their feet were chained, and they were beaten – all for saying that they wanted to look for work with another employer. On January 18, 2008 the US District Attorney released the indictment for this case, which will be tried under the Thirteenth Amendment which forbids slavery. That day Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) was visiting Immokalee and called for congressional hearings into the way in which Burger King and other fast-food corporations' high volume/low cost purchasing practices are helping to create these horrifying conditions.

But Burger King has not only remained intransigent, it has tried to reverse the historic agreements the

farmworkers have made with Yum Brands and McDonald's. You may remember that the 214th General Assembly in 2002 supported the CIW's call for a national consumer boycott of Taco Bell. This led to a ground-breaking agreement between the CIW and Yum Brands, Taco Bell's parent company, in 2005. The historic agreement commits Yum Brands to pay farmworkers an extra penny per pound for tomatoes Taco Bell purchases (nearly doubling workers' wages), to work with the CIW on its code of conduct so that farmworker participation in the protection of their own rights is ensured, and to guarantee transparency in its tomato supply chain. Then the CIW and its allies turned our focus to McDonald's. The 217th General Assembly in 2006 overwhelmingly supported a "Resolution in Support of Ongoing Work with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and the Campaign for Fair Food," solidifying the foundation for the church's committed and public work in this arena.

In April 2007, on the eve of a mass protest in Chicago and the distinct probability that the CIW would declare a boycott, McDonald's came to the table and established an agreement with the farmworkers. The agreement is founded on the principles established in the Yum Brands agreement, but goes a step farther. McDonald's and CIW will work together to create a third-party entity to monitor conditions in the fields. This is a watershed moment, because the creation of such an entity provides a mechanism that can



Immokalee Workers' 9-Mile March on Burger King Headquarters, Miami, Florida, 11/30/07

be used by the entire fast-food industry in partnership with the farmworkers to address human rights abuses in the fields. The CIW-McDonald's agreement lays the cornerstone for industry-wide change in fast-food and agriculture. In May 2007, Yum Brands accelerated momentum for change by extending the Taco Bell-CIW agreement across *all* its brands: KFC, Pizza Hut, Long John Silver's, A&W Restaurants and, of course, Taco Bell.

But despite the strong agreements with Yum and McDonald's, tens of thousands of letters, significant public statements by religious leaders including Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick, and protests across the country, Burger King continues to insist that farmworkers are not poor and that there is no need for them to do anything. Your help is needed if we're to convince BK CEO and Davidson College alumnus, John Chidsey, that "it's time for 'the King' to do the right thing." Presbyterians believe that Social Righteousness is one of the Great Ends of the Church. And at the 217th General Assembly, the PC(USA) reaffirmed the importance of consumer action as a demonstration of the gospel's call to justice and our work with the CIW and the Campaign for Fair Food. Consciousness alone will not

bring about change. Your commitment is needed. Read on to learn more and see how you can contribute to this urgent and growing social movement for human rights.

It's hard to believe that slavery exists in 21st century America, and yet the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) has worked with the U.S. Department of Justice and the F.B.I. to expose and successfully prosecute six cases of slavery in recent years, freeing more than 1,000 slaves. Slavery does not exist in a vacuum: it exists in industries where workers are systematically deprived of their human rights. Farmworkers are explicitly excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, which means that they have no right to organize, their employers are under no obligation to dialogue with their representatives, and they cannot bring grievances to the National Labor Relations Board.

Most farmworkers labor in sweatshop conditions. Farmworkers harvesting tomatoes in Florida earn an average of 45 cents per 32 pound bucket of tomatoes. Their wages have remained essentially stagnant since 1980. According to the most recent National Agricultural Workers Survey (US Department of Labor), farmworkers' average wages are \$10,000 to \$12,499 – below the U.S. poverty line.

The Taco Bell boycott, the McDonald's Campaign were successful and historic efforts to change the structural conditions within the retail food industry that create farmworker poverty and other human rights abuses. In fact they were so successful at beginning to change the balance of power between farmworkers and these large Florida growers, that the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange,

the grower lobby, has now threatened its members with fines of \$100,000 if they participate in either agreement. The FTGE cites "anti-trust concerns" but has not substantiated those concerns. As Columbia Law professor Mark Barenberg said to the *NY Times* in December, "The only possible antitrust violation is by the growers since they seem to be conspiring among themselves to refuse to deal with fast-food companies that want to buy supplies made under certain specifications." [Please see <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/24/us/4tomato.html>].

Presbyterians have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the CIW since farmworkers formed the organization in the early 1990s to combat violence and poverty wages in the fields. Your help is needed now. Visit www.pcusa.org/fairfood for the latest e-actions, news, educational resources, and plans for a spring action at Burger King headquarters in Miami. Together we've made history. Now let's make the future

The author:

The Rev. Noelle Damico is the National Coordinator of the PC(USA) Campaign for Fair Food. She holds a Masters of Divinity degree and a Masters of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. She is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. She may be contacted at noelle.damico@pcusa.org.

Continued from Editor's Spot, p. 2

On Monday Scott Horton, an attorney and human rights advocate, traced the history of torture from the Roman Empire to the present, showing how modern societies (and Christian churches) have moved over the past four or five centuries to reject all uses of torture, only to see the current U.S. president restore it to use.

We heard also from Dr. George Hunsinger, Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, and founder of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. He summarized his theological view this way: "Today the ideology of nationalism and a new and cryptic form of racism are threatening the integrity of the Church." The question for us today, he said, is the same as that faced by German Christians in 1938: "Do we really put our loyalty to Christ above all else?"

Finally, Hunsinger turned to Karl Barth as offering a theological basis for rejecting the use of torture. Barth set forth an incarnational approach to thinking about human rights, "for God has ... fully accepted [human life] in Jesus Christ," and so every human being – in body and in spirit – deserves respect. In that light, we must view torture as we view rape and slavery: "There are *no* circumstances in which it can be acceptable."

There was much more to the conference, both in formal presentations and in the many small group sessions and conversations. I've tried to offer a more complete report on our Witherspoon website. Just go to <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org>, and find the link on the right side of the page.

Across the Great Divide

by Darcy Hawk

The deep wide rivers of western Pennsylvania eroded alternating layers of hard and soft rock, exposing the coal and metal ores that built Pittsburgh. Blue-collar workers lived down in the valleys near mines and steel mills. White-collar workers built their homes above the smoking noisy pits and mills. I grew up in the working class valley, but in 1984 I was called to serve a congregation on the hill. It was a time when the mills were closing; the jobs were going; and nothing stopped the decay and hopelessness of once proud valley towns.

Some members of my new congregation voiced opinions about the plight of the steel workers. "They should have invested their immense earnings instead of buying boats and luxuries. They should have taken stock options instead of raises and more time off." I gradually realized that my new home was a ghetto bounded by isolation, fear and prejudice. Retired bankers, educators and business people failed to realize that the depression of the 1930's was a deep-rooted memory in the valley towns where banks were known to take people's hard earned money and then fold up and go away. The stock market was on a par with the floating dice game down at the corner or the numbers you could play at the barbershop. Short of burying your cash in a can out back (and I knew of people in my home town who did that), property seemed to be the only safe investment. My parents lost their first home thanks to an extended steel strike. Bank foreclosures confirmed blue-collar suspicions that investments must be tangible to be secure. A piece of property was seen

to be far more secure than mutual funds, government bonds, IRAs, or stocks. When the mills closed the jobs fled first to Dixie and then to Mexico and China. No one could make a decent living in the valleys of Western Pennsylvania. Steel workers couldn't sell their homes and follow the jobs because their homes didn't have buyers, or if there was a buyer the offer was not enough to underwrite a new start.

Prosperity came late to the valleys and was short lived. Mill salaries didn't expand until the nineteen sixties and early seventies, and minority employment was the last to grow and the first to collapse. A presbyter once presented an appeal for a financial aid fund because she uncovered the disturbing fact that some people live from paycheck to paycheck. An unexpected medical bill could mean missing a car payment or having the heat turned off. The hill folks always had a little put back for rainy days, when in the valley it was always raining. Our fathers made decent livings and came home mill blackened and heavy-booted. Our mothers managed meager resources and provided the social fabric of community. It was a world where a boss only owned eight hours of the day, five days a week. Now work takes both parents, their leisure time, their political allegiance, with the added right to interrupt vacations via cell phone.

Some of us valley children grabbed an education when it was still possible for the working class to go to college. Now community college is the only option for some of the best and brightest who cannot afford the full-time engagement in education that their intelligence and skills demand. It leaves me both angry and frightened that the education I received is no longer available to people from my valley towns. This nation has aban-

doned and devalued people, making them as disposable as the rest of our "throw away" culture. We need to value manual labor. (Among the jobs that got me through school I count three summers of labor in a sewage plant – never underestimate the value of good plumbing.) Our society needs all the skills and gifts of its members and our faith demands justice and equity. Pennsylvania's decaying valley towns stand witness to gross injustice and nearsighted opportunism, but you can't see them from the hill tops where the new interstates go by.

The author:

Darcy Hawk is the Treasurer of the Witherspoon Society, and is pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Gibsonia, PA.

Let's keep in touch!

If you're a Witherspoon member, we'd like to include you on our special e-mail list for members. You'll receive only occasional notes, whenever we have a special bit of information or concern to share with you. Just send a note to dougking2@aol.com. Ask to be added to our "members only" list.

All in the Working Family: the Witherspoon Society Heritage

by Richard Poethig

As the Witherspoon Society looks back over its thirty-five year history, it is good to acknowledge our socially-engaged forebears, from the theological legacy of John Calvin to those who have carried the Reformed social dynamic into issues of U.S. industrial and post-industrial society.

Starting in the late 19th century, industrialization challenged the U.S. Presbyterian Church to see its role in society from a new perspective. Waves of immigrants seeking economic opportunities, filled American cities, changed neighborhoods, and provided new energy to the labor force.

Among Presbyterians who grappled with these challenges was Charles Thompson, who, at the turn of the 20th century, headed the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, and who saw immigration in a positive light. Unlike many business-oriented church members, who saw this new work force as a threat to the status quo, Thompson sought to bring their energies into the church.

Thompson in turn brought Charles Stelzle on staff in 1903, to head the Workingman's Department, with the charge to awaken the church to the issues of working people. Stelzle had himself grown up on New York's impoverished Lower East Side, and, as a worker, was a member of the International Association of Machinists (IAM). He was a workingman's preacher and, previous to his recruitment by Thompson, had been gathering a Sunday School of 1400 at Markham Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO. During his 10 year tenure at the Board, Stelzle brought the issues of American working people to the forefront of the church's consciousness and helped bring it as an institution into the Social Gospel Movement.

Stelzle was one of many clergy from many denominations who responded to the call for change in the social order. Urban pastors, recognizing the magnitude of the changes taking place, saw the need for inter-denominational cooperation. The result was the Federal Council of Churches, which in 1908 summed up the spirit of the times in its Social Creed of the Churches. Through a series of resolutions, the creed lifted up the daily realities of working people. It outlined practical goals, which, if achieved, would bring the nation closer to an economically just sys-

tem. This included on the job protections for workers, the abolition of child labor, regulations to protect women, a shorter work day, one day off a week, the minimum wage being set as a living wage, pension and disability benefits, and the equitable distribution of profits.

At its 1910 General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church in the USA, called for implementation of the recommendations of the Social Creed. Rev. John McDowell, the minister who brought the affirmation before the General Assembly for consideration, had himself lost an arm in a Pennsylvania coal mining accident at the age of 12. The focal point of the social statement his committee sent to the body for a vote was the obligation of wealth to establish a more just economic order.

Workplace issues raised by the Social Creed became headlines with the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930's. The chasm between workers and owners of the means of production was evident in the long unemployment lines, the prevalence of soup kitchens, and the presence of shanty Hoovervilles that sprang up across both urban and rural America. Many clergy saw these scenes of human misery as proof of the need to change the laissez-faire economics that had taken hold in the United States. They came to identify themselves with the efforts of organized labor and channeled their energies in winning support from church people for economic change.

One of the forerunners of the Witherspoon Society was the Presbyterian Fellowship for Social Action in the Synod of New York. It was organized at its 1934 annual meeting in Buffalo, NY and claimed as members Professor John Bennett, Auburn Seminary, Edmund Chaffee, head of the Labor Temple in New York, the Rev. Ray Freeman, Park Central Church, Syracuse, and Shubert Frye, Associate Executive of the Synod of New York. The Fellowship rooted itself in the social statements of the 1933 and 1934 General Assemblies:

It is now evident that the more the industrial depression has been prolonged, the greater has been the tendency to cut wages, to increase hours of labor, and to undermine the protection afforded by labor laws...Under these conditions working people have a right to look...to the Christian Churches to help create a public opinion which will maintain the standards of enforcement...and insist on whatever new laws may be necessary to protect the well-being and welfare of the people. As the body of Christ, the Christian Church must be the most swiftly-moving of all institutions to challenge whatever cripples or dishonors human life, to insist that no economic emergency justifies human

oppression, that if the right to live interceded with profits, profits necessarily give way to right...

The social pronouncements of the 1934 General Assembly went even further by criticizing economic competition as a way of life, and calling for the exploration of public ownership and the control of natural resources and economic institutions. GA 1934 also suggested that property rights were to be judged by the function that the property holder was able and willing to perform on behalf of the community.

The newly formed Presbyterian Fellowship for Social Action saw its primary task as the support of these social pronouncements as well as moving similar resolutions through the Synod of New York Social Service Committee. In 1934, the NY Synod called for an extension of striker relief, just worker wages as a primary obligation of industry, education of congregations regarding labor disputes, adequate housing for workers, unemployment insurance, an end to child labor, and support for the operation of public utilities "for the well-being of the masses and not in the interest of private profits." Following two hours of debate, the Synod Assembly voted two to one in favor of the resolution.

Following this action, the Presbyterian Fellowship for Social Action sent a delegate to the State Federation of Labor and to lobby the New York State Assembly to pass legislation limiting child labor. In 1935 it sent an overture to General Assembly to establish a "social service agency for the whole church." After a year of study the 148th General Assembly of 1936 proceeded to merge the Committee on Social and Industrial Relations of the Board of National Missions and the Committee on Social Education of the Board of Christian Education into the Department of Social Education and Action. Charles Turck, president of Center College in Kentucky was called to be the first secretary of the new department.

The role of this new Department was to educate the church on national social issues, functioning as the forerunner of the Church and Society Unit of the United Presbyterian Church, USA, established in 1961. It published "Social Progress," educational material for congregations, set up conferences for Presbyteries and Synods, and promoted study of the social pronouncements of the General Assembly. It also worked in cooperation with the Department of City, Immigrant, and Industrial Work of the Board of National Missions concerning urban-industrial issues facing congregations.

In 1939, Cameron Hall assumed leadership of the department, becoming a vital link to Presbyterian work in the economic sphere. Formerly pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church, an urban mission in New York's Hell's Kitchen, he was in touch with the struggles of working people. While there he opened the church to meetings of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) during a strike. As head of Social Education and Action, he led the department to pay more attention to the economic issues facing the nation. In 1943 he put together a special GA committee, composed of lay people from both the business and labor communities, to develop a major statement of the church regarding industrial issues facing the US. In 1944 "The Church and Industrial Relations" was adopted by the 156th General Assembly during its meeting in Chicago.

Jacob Long, of the City, Immigrant, and Industrial Work Department, acted immediately on the report's recommendations. Long came out of the building trades and had served a new church development on the edges of Philadelphia. Concerned about the growing experience gap between Presbyterian clergy and church workers and the realities of postwar industry in the US, he saw the need to prepare church leadership for the flare up of tension between labor and management that had been set aside during WWII. He called for the creation of an institute to implement the goals of the "Church and Industrial Relations" report, resulting in the establishment of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR) to be based at New York's Labor Temple.

Throughout its thirty year history, the PIIR offered programs that raised the level of understanding and commitment to justice questions around US industrial society. Seminarians, pastors and laity participated in seminars and the "Minister-in-industry" experiences, grappling with issues of organized labor and the changing nature of industry. They took on the deindustrialization of the US, the flight of jobs overseas, and the persistence of hard core poverty in urban areas. Their widening sense of justice questions in relation to the global economy led them to engagement with their local congregations, presbyteries, and the national church.

One obvious question, in this time when progressive church programs are often so strongly resisted, is how the proponents of this social mission won the support of the national church. They did it partly by what today we call networking. Charles Stelzle, for example, travelled widely and worked at developing local programs in places where

"Poethig" continues on page 23

A major Ghost Ranch event this summer!

July 28 - August 3, 2008

Paths toward Peace and Justice: Spirituality, Earth-Care, and the Prophetic Word in a time of Violence

In partnership with the Witherspoon Society, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Presbyterians for Restoring Creation, and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

Jane Hanna, Coordinator

Come to Ghost Ranch for a revival of the old fashioned "cowboy camp-meetings" of its history. Each morning will offer high quality workshops on a wide variety of issues and artistic expressions related to peacemaking, justice and earth-care. Afternoons will include some activities and free time to enjoy Ghost Ranch. Nancy Eng MacNeill and Mark Koenig of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program staff will offer an intergenerational activity each day after lunch.

Evenings will center on all-Ranch worship with former PC(USA) Moderator John Fife and Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb offering the prophetic word in the beautiful Agape Center, looking out over the valley toward Pederal. This year the "arts" side of the program will be coordinated with the "seminar" side. Rev. Carol Wickersham, founder of No2Torture, will design and coordinate the worship experiences.

There will be a special "Peace and Justice Track" for high school students this year, in an experience that integrates the high school students into the broader community and conversation. High school seminars will be highly interactive, activity-based, and a lot of fun.

Rick Ufford-Chase and Gail Brown will reprise the popular "camp culture" begun in 2007, offering a low-cost housing and food option in the campground. Enjoy fellowship over shared meals and late night campfires.

To join us, you can register for any one of these courses:

The Covenant Community (Peace and Justice Witness through developing a religious order that centers on a vocational commitment to peace and justice work) led by Rick Ufford-Chase, Tucson, AZ, Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Moderator of the 216th General Assembly of the PC(USA).

Faith, Workers and Economic Justice (the economic challenges facing workers, concrete strategies for challenging unjust treatment of workers, and hands-on practice in

putting our faith into effective action) led by Kim Bobo, Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice and co-author of *Organizing for Social Change*, and Trina Zelle, Witherspoon Society co-moderator, and Director of Arizona Interfaith Worker Justice.

Preaching the Prophetic Word in a Time of Fear, which will be team-taught by conference preachers Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and the Rev. John Fife.

Singing Songs of Peace in a Turbulent World (looking at the rich history of the music of peace, and crafting music and words that help express the human longings for peace), led by Tom Zehnder and Tim Gibbs Zehnder, who compose, arrange, perform and record as an independent duo based in Los Angeles.

Restorative Justice: Building Peace through Relationships (exploring peace building educational practices that are based on relationship skills), led by Amy McConnell Franklin, Taos, NM, an educator and trainer in emotional intelligence.

Prophetic Ministry in an Eco-Justice Frame (practical strategies for transformation combined with theological reflection and ethical analysis about the environmental crisis), led by the Rev. Peter Sawtell, Executive Director of Eco-Justice Ministries.

Creating a Culture of Peace: Nonviolence Training for Personal and Social Change (a holistic and practical foundation in the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence) led by Janet Chisholm, who coordinates peace and justice programs at Kirkridge Retreat Center.

Poetry of Protest (looking at poetry as a strategy for speaking out about the ideas and issues which matter most to us), led by Anita Skeen, Arts Coordinator for the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities at Michigan State, and author of five books of poems.

"Do Not Forsake Us in Our Time of Conflict" (meditative prayer, teaching and sharing, rest and silence, and reflection and embodiment of our week's theme in the evenings) led by J. Philip Newell, Companion Theologian for the Community of Casa del Sol; Alison Newell, Teacher of Spiritual Direction in Scotland; Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev of Santa Fe, NM, and a representative of the Islamic Community of New Mexico.

More information — both general and about each of the seminars — is on the Witherspoon website: <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2008/ghost%20ranch%2008.htm>

For more information, and to register, go to the Ghost Ranch website: <http://www.ghostranch.org/>

A review essay

***The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism,* by Naomi Klein**

(New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2007. First edition. 558 pp. Hardcover.)

Reviewed by Sidney Oliver

“Only a crisis – actual or perceived — produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.” Milton Friedman, 1982

In *The Shock Doctrine (TSD)*, Naomi Klein, a Canadian journalist and former London School of Economics fellow, guides us through the catastrophic consequences of Friedman’s philosophy -- from the overthrow of Chile’s Allende in 1974 to the occupation of Iraq and the abandonment of New Orleans in 2005. What many of us have chalked up to incompetence is actually, according to Klein, a systematic and almost incomprehensibly evil global mugging that she calls “disaster capitalism.”

Klein starts us at an unlikely place: 1950’s experiments at McGill University in electroshock “psychotherapy,” with results studied by the CIA which then created a torture protocol using electric shocks and extreme sensory deprivation to regress its subjects to a helpless, dependent state. She documents how, over time, the “shock and regression” process morphed with Cold War doctrine, and the economics of self-interest to become a whole new way of doing business in the world.

Systematized and exported by Friedrich Hayek as well as Friedman

and his protégés (known world-wide as the “Chicago Boys,” due to their origins at the University of Chicago’s School of Economics), this remains the master strategy for replacing vulnerable national economies with Friedman’s unique “free market” model. Chicago School free-market economics includes full market deregulation, removal of social safety nets, tax cuts for the wealthy, privatization of common resources, and a removal of trade barriers and human rights. In the context of the United States, there is an agenda to dismantle any vestiges of FDR’s New Deal. Beyond our borders, the stifling of emergent, left-leaning “developmentalist” economies is a priority, as well as the cooptation of emerging capitalist nations like Russia and China. The securing of new strategic global markets and resources is done under the flag of “freedom,” with resulting profits and power funneled to the privileged few. Success relies on the seizure of public assets, external control of natural resources, and appropriation of the political system. For, to paraphrase Friedman, political freedom is less important than economic freedom.

But, why? The Keynesian principles that informed the New Deal here and progressive developmentalism elsewhere created *managed* economies that produced the most prosperous and egalitarian societies the world has ever known. They generated massive benefits and great stability for whole nations of ordinary citizens, but at the expense of some of the limitless profits the Robber Barons had been able to retain in the Darwinian pre-Depression, pre-managed economy era.

And so a powerful few, unmoved by the sacred promise of equality — set about to change public perception. “Big government interference” became Goliath against the mythic self-regulating “free market” David. Inheritance taxes were reframed as “death taxes,” social safety nets were nothing but the enforced redistribution of profits that rightfully belonged to those who (at least in their own minds) created them.

Clearly, this had to change.

It did.

Friedman’s manifesto, *Capitalism and Freedom*, published in 1962, became “the global free-market rulebook and, in the U.S., would form the economic agenda of the neoconservative movement.” (56) It showed how all that appalling economic management could be removed in one fell swoop – with a natural or engineered catastrophe, throwing the population into post-traumatic shock and shifting their minds from luxuries like democratic constitutional law and the common good to simple survival. In other words, disaster capitalism.

Friedman showed how, overnight, a

government forearmed with his plan could create civil disorder; impose martial law; detain, disappear, or deport its political opponents (Leftist lawyers, union leaders, social justice and anti-poverty workers, antiwar protesters, feminists, what-have-you); use torture and high-visibility selective killings to traumatize the left-behind, and then deregulate all banks and businesses, dismantle all social safety nets, and plunge the nation into a massive recession in order to “shock” the economy back to “health.” The highly-placed wealthy few could then help themselves to the devalued property of the middle and working classes, slash their wages, strip away all social support systems, leave the poor to die (or drown), and seize sole ownership (at fire-sale prices) of as many public resources as possible in the name of “privatization” and a “free market” economy.

Unbelievable?

In one case study after another — Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Israel and Palestine, Lebanon, Honduras, Poland, China, Russia, South Africa, Thatcher’s UK, Iraq, New Orleans — Klein shows how Friedman’s disaster capitalism has been systematically tested and refined over the last three-plus decades worldwide, under the tutelage of the “Chicago Boys” and with the involvement of the US government and its handmaidens, the World Bank, USAID, and the International Monetary Fund.

Throughout, Klein hammers the point home that “the repression and the economics are in fact a single unified project” (124) creating a campaign of “planned misery” much more efficient at stealing lives than bullets.

These takeovers, violent or not, are episodes of repressive occupation even when ushered in by elections. *Human rights are always the first to go.*

As Klein documents, the heavy losers are the dispossessed middle classes and the written-off poor. The beneficiaries are the super wealthy financiers, the arms dealers, the owners and large shareholders of favored multinational or crony corporations, the venture capital and holding company principals and their powerful political, academic, and military enablers. She lists a who’s who of household names: Monsanto, Ford, Phillip Morris, Blackwater-USA, the Carlyle Group, Searle, Gilead Sciences (with its patents on HIV-AIDS drugs and Tamiflu™), and Halliburton to name a few.

TSD provides us with the means to understand just how a prosperous managed economy like the New Deal, in a thriving and venerable democracy, can be replaced overnight by the feeding frenzy misleadingly touted as a “free market” economy. Suddenly, much about contemporary American life that is patently counter-democratic is transparent: for instance, why CEOs in 1980 earned a seemingly 43 times the average worker, but by 2005 earn 411 times as much (444); why FEMA “failed”; what “building back better” really means; why Bush has amassed trillions in national debt; why he attacked Iraq; and where concepts like school vouchers, charter schools, and pay-go healthcare actually come from. Bush’s “ownership society,” is nothing more than the recycling of Chicago School policies as played out by the late Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.

But, as Klein concludes, there’s also some good news: Disaster capitalism’s chief advocates here in the US are losing credibility and power, and, ideally, won’t be elected in 2008. And all across the globe, the people are successfully resisting. Such examples are critical, and they are inspiring.

Bottom line: If you hope to understand today’s dominant issues—privatization, free trade, outsourcing, globalization, tax policy, public education, healthcare, environmental protection, unions, recession, home foreclosures, gas prices, the corporate influence in politics, “income inequity,” flat wages, and the rest—get this book and read it ASAP. And spread the word. Old-fashioned church-based teach-ins seem like a plan to me.

The author:

Sidney Oliver is a writer/editor, social justice activist, and polymer clay artist who lives in Phoenix, AZ with her partner Catherine, the Dobermans Bey and Arwen, and Pico, the family Chi. She blogs online at <http://www.wildchihuahuas.blogspot.com>

Shannon O'Donnell reports from Jerusalem

Paths of peaceful resistance in a land torn by violence

Shannon O'Donnell is a Presbyterian Mission Volunteer, serving with the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem.

A recent visit to Germany led her to reflect on the courageous Germans who chose the dangerous path of peaceful resistance to Nazism. She says, "I have been thinking of the many ways that people can break away from the mainstream crowd when it is not quite headed in the right direction."

The Witherspoon Society is proud to be providing a portion of her support.

Jerusalem Gym Rat

The Israeli lady in the locker room said it plainly: *"He freezes the whole city when he comes...is it worth it?"* It's all the chatter in the gym: he's coming this week. No, not some sports hero or fitness guru, but a man who is well known all across the Middle East. His reputation is littered with bitterness from many who live here. People will either speak favorably about him, or spit on the ground upon the mere mentioning of his name. All this is from one man's visit to Israel/Palestine, President George W. Bush.

Today I noticed that there are American flags now waving from the streetlamps. There will be extra security throughout the city. I don't know what Bush's visit will accomplish, but I do know for certain that it will cause daily traffic jams, and headaches for the residents of Jerusalem. And I will not be going to my yoga class at the YMCA, which is located across the street from the King David Hotel, where Bush is staying, because of all the extra security checks in the area.

For several months now I have intentionally been exploring more in West Jerusalem, the Jewish side of town. One afternoon last month, I stumbled into the YMCA, and spontaneously joined in on a hip-hop dance class. I was hooked, and decided to get a temporary membership to take more dance and yoga classes. But I was also hesitant to join because of all the questions I'd have to answer: Where do I live? Where do I work? At first I was going to lie my way through the gym application process, because I wasn't sure how the Israeli staff would react to someone who is "pro-Palestine". Would they understand that being "pro-Palestine" doesn't mean I am "anti-Israel?" Luckily, the dance instructor sensed my initial hesitation and said that this is a very open minded place, so I told the truth and have been going regularly ever since. I am grateful for such institutions, like the YMCA. The quote on the plaque outside the beautiful building reads:

"Here is a place whose atmosphere is peace where political and religious jealousies can be forgotten and international unity be fostered and developed."

—From Lord Allenby's dedication address, April 1933

I admit I didn't expect to feel accepted at such a place on the West side of town, but I often see Palestinians at the gym, and am glad that there are such resources available. I am also finally making some sense of the Hebrew language, because the yoga classes

are mostly all in Hebrew. There is also a YMCA in East Jerusalem, the Arab side of town. Unfortunately, their gym is not so good, and there are not yoga or dance classes there.

Paths of Peaceful Resistance

I have been thinking of the many ways that people can break away from the mainstream crowd when it is not quite headed in the right direction. People appear outwardly just to accept some situations, while others stimulate a reaction from them. Sometimes that reaction is violent, or unjust, or loud, or peaceful, or silent.



"Dodgers Alley" in Munich

On a recent trip to Germany, I visited Munich and saw the places where Hitler's rise to power began. The Nazis effort to take over the Bavarian State is referred to as the "Beer Hall Putsch." The Nazi party was marching from the beer hall to the Bavarian Ministry building, and chaos broke out, leaving 17 people killed. After Hitler came to power, he had a memorial plaque placed on the corner where this event took place. Everyone who walked past it had to give the Nazi salute; those who didn't were shot on the spot.

There were many who chose to resist non-violently. They simply went down

an alley that took them a slightly longer route around the memorial area. This small road became known as "Dodgers Alley." However, once the Nazis noticed their actions, they stopped people from using the alley, and people died as a result of resistance. A small gold-colored strip of stones is the only memorial for those who utilized Dodgers Alley, but still, I wonder what it must have been like for those people who chose a different path to avoid an unjust regime. How many hearts were beating fast as they moved down that alley? How many hearts gave into injustice to save their own lives? Which path would I chose?

I think no matter what cause God places upon our hearts, there are simple acts of non-violence that can powerfully spark the soul. It may be boycotting a product or company, protesting, going down Dodger's Alley, or wearing a "Free Palestine" t-shirt to yoga class. We all have an important contribution towards raising awareness. I have also found that it is equally important not to judge others as we attempt such a task.

We all have to start somewhere, as awareness is often not earned, but gained. I don't see it as a prize we parade in the streets, or a flag we fly from streetlamps. It is a burden that makes your heart heavy, especially if the situation remains unresolved. It is a form of love that causes you to reach out from the accumulation of awareness which has cracked and broken your heart wide open. Mother Teresa once said: "It is very important for us to realize that love, to be true, has to hurt. I must be willing to give whatever it takes not to harm other people and, in fact, to do good to them. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise there is no true love in me and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me."

I take heart in knowing that God gave

until it hurt, that Christ prayed until he bled. That God continues today to give, even though it hurts, and we are called to do the same. We are to love people, even when it hurts. There is freedom in such love, and perhaps the only way to develop a deeper awareness of God's heart.

May we learn to pray with our hearts, minds, and even our eyes wide open.

Shannon

Continued from "Poethig, page 18

there were work-place issues. Those who really perfected this were the inner-city National Ministries staffers in the 1960s.

Of course there was resistance from the very beginning. Stelzle immediately had his foes, who called him a "socialist" and tried to cut or reshape his program. He finally resigned in 1913, but only after he had established the Labor Temple, which went on to influence many people in social mission.

Until the Great Depression, many Presbyterians had resisted the notion of "social mission," but the consequences of economic failure made the need for it too obvious to ignore. Successive General Assemblies issued social statements that spoke to the economic realities faced by ordinary church members and working people in general. It was during this difficult period in American history that the Presbyterian tradition of social statements and the development of related educational materials became even more deeply rooted. To-

To receive regular e-mail notes of additions to the Witherspoon website, just send a note to douging2@aol.com



Please put "web updates" in the subject line.

day, in the spirit of Stelze, Hall, Thompson and many others, Presbyterians remain alert to emerging social justice issues, engaging congregational and presbytery allies to address them.

It is from this group that the Witherspoon Society has drawn its membership and support. This is the family to which we belong and out of which we live our Reformed heritage.

The author:

Richard Poethig was raised in the working class East Side tenements of New York. He studied under Reinhold Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary, worked in new church development in a Buffalo industrial suburb (1952-56), served as fraternal worker in urban-industrial mission with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (1957-72), and then as Dean of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations and Director of the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society (1972 - 1982) in Chicago.

Theological musings

“Tempted as We Are Yet without Sin” A Christological Paradox

Paul E. Capetz, Associate Professor of Historical Theology at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

This column appears regularly, authored sometimes by Dr. Capetz, and sometimes by Dr. Douglas Ottati, Professor in Reformed Theology and Justice Ministry at Davidson College.

We celebrate the fact that Dr. Capetz, who laid aside his ordination in 2000 as an act of conscience after the passage of G-6.0106b, was restored to ordained ministry when the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area approved his request for reinstatement on January 26, 2008. And we deeply lament the recent GA PJC decision that calls into question that restoration.

For more on this development, please go to <http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2008/declaring%20scruples.htm>

For some time now, I have been puzzled by the traditional Christian doctrine that Jesus was sinless in spite of the fact that the church has emphatically insisted upon his full and complete humanity. My question is not so much whether this claim is true, but rather what it actually means. Can one be truly human without missing the mark, at least in some sense?

My puzzle is compounded when I read the story of Jesus' temptations by Satan (Matt. 4:1-11). Was Jesus really tempted or was this all a theatrical performance? Did Jesus have to struggle with himself so as not to give in to Satan's allure or is the outcome never in doubt to begin with? I suppose that the belief that Jesus was not only “fully human” but also “fully divine” answers the question for itself. Insofar as Jesus was divine, there is no problem in understanding how he could overcome temptations to which the rest of us succumb so easily. But insofar as Jesus was really human and not merely nominally so, the question is far more difficult.

The Letter to the Hebrews affirms that Jesus was not someone “unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning” (Heb. 4:15). What does it mean to be tempted without sinning? Before answering that question, however, we would first need to gain clarity on how the terms “temptation” and “sin” are being defined.

One could imagine being in dire financial straits and thus tempted to cheat the IRS or even to rob a bank and yet refrain from executing the crime for fear of imprisonment. Is that an example of what it means to be tempted yet without sinning? Or what about the temptation to pick up a cigarette even though I know it is unhealthy? Have I refrained from sin by not choosing the guilty pleasure that would be mine if I were to light up? What if I am tempted to rail at an insufferable colleague at work but contain my impulse because I know my angry words will be hurtful? We often hear people say that a piece of cake looks tempting but decide not to indulge in eating it either because they are already full or because they are dieting.

In these examples, the temptation refers to the inner state of feeling when the mind contemplates doing something, whereas sin refers to the act or deed. Still, these examples show how our use of these words can be stretched to cover so much ground that their meaning is really quite imprecise. Not all temptations are temptations to commit crimes or acts of immorality. Surely Jesus must have been tempted by the idea of eating bread after forty days of fasting. But this temptation was not of a moral nature. When we ask what it means to say that Jesus was tempted and yet without sin, we have to restrict the meanings of temptation and sin to religious and moral matters.



Paul Capetz

In the classical Christian tradition sin has been defined as being more than merely deeds or acts. It also refers to the intention or underlying desire behind sinful acts. Shortly after the story of Jesus' temptation in Matthew's gospel, we read in the Sermon on the Mount that anger is akin to murder (Matt. 5:21-22). Then we are told that a lustful glance is a form of adultery (Matt. 5:27-28). These texts lead me to wonder what it means to assert that Jesus was really tempted “in every respect ... as we are, yet without sinning.” Was Jesus tempted to feel anger but never felt it? Was Jesus tempted to feel sexual attraction but never felt it? If Jesus felt neither anger nor desire, how could he know what they are? Someone with no first-hand experience of either feeling would hardly be in a position “to sympathize with our weaknesses.” Still, if Jesus did share in these common human feelings, must we conclude that they are always temptations to do something wrong?

Perhaps we should view these examples from the Sermon on the Mount as hyperbolic, pointing to the truth that anger is the

source of murder and that lust is the source of adultery. But anger can also inspire efforts to rectify situations of social injustice and sexual desire can lead to genuine love as in a marriage. In other words, deeds or actions spring from feelings or affections and our moral character is as much about how we respond to our feelings as it is about the acts we commit.

The temptations to which Jesus is subjected by Satan are not the stuff of everyday life: changing stones into bread, jumping off a building in order to be rescued by angels, and worshipping Satan. Jesus is not dealing with ordinary human temptations but rather with temptations arising from his divine status (“If you are the Son of God...”). Jesus resists the temptations to be a certain kind of messiah, e.g., as “king” or “lord” of this world. Unlike Satan who is a fallen angel, Jesus remains obedient to God. Interestingly, Satan tries to trick Jesus by quoting from scripture, but Jesus knows his Bible too well to be seduced by bad hermeneutics.

When we try to understand the temptation narrative from the point of view of Jesus’ crucifixion, we can easily perceive that Jesus was not the kind of messiah who subdued evil through an overt display of supernatural power. Rather, he humbled himself through obedience to God, even unto death (Phil. 2:8). Surely Jesus was tempted to find a way to avoid the pain of the cross (Matt. 26:39). Who wouldn’t be?

The early church’s insistence on the sinless nature of Jesus was, in part, an attempt to defend him against the accusation that he deserved his punishment since he had committed a crime (Matt. 27:4). Moreover, his death was soon interpreted as atoning for the sins of others, so it was necessary to view him as a sacrifice “without blemish” (Heb. 9:14). Whether Jesus was, in fact, sinless is a question that we cannot answer. Even if we could agree on what we meant by sin, we do not know everything that Jesus did in his life and we are certainly not in a position to ascertain his every thought and feeling. But we should not allow the belief in his divinity to minimize his real humanity, which includes all temptations with which persons struggle in this life.

Perhaps the surest thing we can say is that the New Testament presents us with a portrait of a person whose dominant devotion was to the service of God amid trials, tribulations, pressures, and even real temptations. Clearly, the primary purpose of this portrait is not to report past history but to form our moral and spiritual character in a manner appropriate to a Christian understanding of life before God. We can allow ourselves thus to be informed (in the sense of “shaped” or “molded”) by this portrait of Jesus as steadfast and faithful to God’s purposes, in spite of the temptations of our lives with which we struggle.

Witherspoon News

Witherspoon officers elected

Witherspoon members have voted (well, some of them), and Co-Moderator Trina Zelle reports that all nominees have been elected unanimously.

The Rev. Jake Young has been re-elected as Co-Moderator to serve for two years, until 2010. The Rev. Mitch Trigger has been re-elected as Secretary/Communicator, for 2008-2010. Three new members have been elected as At-Large Members of the Board: Gusti Newquist, the Rev. Barbara Renton, and the Rev. Catherine C. Snyder. (For bio sketches of our three new members, see the Fall 2007 issue of *Network News*, page 15.)

As the Board welcomes its new members, we also want to express our warm appreciation to retiring members Ken Smith, Michelle Freeman, Lucy Harris, and Kent Holmes. We’re grateful especially to Ken Smith, who served us so well, first as Vice President, and then as President from 2004 to 2006. We wish him well!

Time to renew your membership?

The expiration date of your membership is printed just above your mailing address on the back cover of this issue.

If your time is about up – or even past! – we hope you’ll use the return envelope in the center of this issue, and send in your renewal. Save us the expense of nagging you!

And consider giving a gift membership!

Our return envelope now has a space where you can fill in the name and address of someone who you think would appreciate what we’re doing.

So even if you’re paid up for yourself, please consider giving a membership for someone else. You’ll help support Witherspoon with your payment, and by adding a new member.

Thanks!

The Co-Moderators' Column

Mission and that Other Inconvenient Truth

by Jake Young

In recent years, the Witherspoon Society has developed an active interest in Presbyterian world mission. Since the 2003 General Assembly in Denver, we have met several times with denominational world mission officials, hosted two global mission conferences, added a former mission coworker to our board, and initiated our Global Engagement Initiative resulting in the partial funding of a missionary currently serving in Jerusalem.

I suppose this is why we were invited to participate in the first-ever consultation on World Mission in the PC(USA) in January: "Renewed Call to Presbyterian Mission in the World: A Dialogue for Our Shared Future." The consultation was the result of a Commissioner's Resolution to the 217th GA (2006). The CR (GA Item 08-17) requested the Moderator convene a "meeting regarding worldwide mission work of the PC(USA)."

Specific meeting participants included the Executive Director of the GAC, the Stated Clerk, representatives from the GAC and staff, the Outreach Foundation (OF), Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship (PFF), Medical Benevolence Foundation (MBF), and "other persons concerned about the future of the worldwide mission work of the PC (USA)." Designated purposes of the meeting were manifold and basically entailed developing a common denominational missiological understanding in consultation with our global partner churches. To this end, six global partners were included in the consultation from Peru, India, Colombia, Ghana, Vietnam and the

World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Why did the author of the CR, and subsequently the GA, determine a world mission consultation was necessary at this time? It's difficult to know all the reasons. Presbyterian global mission has always been a multifaceted enterprise. Professor Scott Sunquist (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) raised our awareness of this historical reality by, among other things, noting the long history of missionary societies in Presbyterian denominations.

But, in just the last few years, a number of developments have taken place indicating a need for a denomination-wide consultation among interested parties. Perhaps the most significant is the development of The Antioch Partners (TAP). This organization, representing primarily PFF and OF, has become a missionary-sending agency, a novel development contrasting with the practice of sending missionaries from the central denominational offices since reunification in 1983.

From my perspective, the consultation was extraordinarily successful. By the end of our time together, we produced a two-page document outlining our shared values and goals in pursuing global mission as Presbyterians. [Find it at <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/pdf/invitationtoexpandingpartnership.pdf>]

Though probably not permanently transcending the interpretive frameworks which divide us, we discovered a solid common ground during our three days together. I can hap-

pily report a sophisticated theology of mission on the part of all those at the consultation – even, and especially, among those with whom I anticipated some disagreements. Humility, for example, was clearly recognized as the starting point for all mission efforts.

Notwithstanding the generally conciliatory environment of the consultation, I must note special gratification for the presence of our global mission partners. A frequent reference throughout the meeting was Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat*. (I read the 2.0 version. Now I understand 3.0 is out. Can one keep up?) Friedman notes some of the negative economic consequences of free market globalization, but on the whole, he is a cheerleader for what he describes as the "flattening of the earth."

However, our global partners were not convinced. The Reverend Milton Mejia of Colombia explained, "The world is flat for only a small group of people." Others echoed his critique of Friedman's exuberance – an exuberance which borders on irrational. "Even for North Americans," Mejia noted, "the world is not flat." He then described how he has observed clear asymmetry in access to the "flatteners" Friedman propounds such as internet connectivity and cellular phones.

Verily, verily, the imperative need for economic justice really is the other inconvenient truth for us all.

May we be grateful for our great, big family of Presbyterian sisters and brothers and mindful of our call to speak truth to power, however inconvenient those truths may be.

OFFICERS OF THE WITHERSPOON SOCIETY

Co-Moderator (2006-07)

Jake Young
North Anderson Community Church,
Presbyterian
4200 Liberty Highway
Anderson, SC 29621
W - 864-225-3575
H - 864-231-8067
C - 217-494-3030
E-mail: jakeayoung@yahoo.com

Co-Moderator (2006-08)

Trina Zelle
169 W. LaVie Lane
Tempe, AZ 85284
H - 480-458-0536
C - 480-522-4707
E-mail: zellerev@cox.net

Secretary/Communicator (2006-07)

Mitchell Trigger
First Presbyterian Church
35 Church Street
Rockaway, NJ 07866
H - 973-784-4818
W - 973-627-1059
F - 973-083-0090
E-mail: mitch@revtrigger.org

Treasurer (2006-08)

Darcy Hawk
4007 Gibsonia Road
Gibsonia, PA 15044-8312
H - 724-443-0748
W - 724-443-2092
C - 412-585-3317
E-mail: djhawk@zoominternet.net

Issues Analyst (2006-07)

Eugene TeSelle
1925 19th Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37212
H - 615-297-2629
C - 615-509-0087
E-mail: teselle@bellsouth.net

Membership Coordinator (2006-08)

John Harris
70-21 Forest Ave
Ridgewood, NY 11385
H - 347-907-9372
E-mail:
membershipcoordinator@witherspoonsociety.org

Members at Large

Peter Barnes-Davies (2006-08)
1200 Cherokee Rd. #1
Louisville, KY 40204
H - 502-479-1613
C - 502-445-2452
E-mail: noublieribaanc@gmail.com

Bill Dummer (2006-08)
5109 W Washington Blvd
Milwaukee, WI 53208-1704
H - 414-475-0076
E-mail: gardenerdummer@yahoo.com

Gusti Newquist
92 Hudson Street
Somerville, MA 02143
H - 502-552-4840
E-mail: gusti_newquist@yahoo.com

Barbara Renton
2891 State Highway 7
Bainbridge, NY 13733-3321
H - 607-967-4819
E-mail: renton@frontiernet.net

Catherine C. Snyder (2008-10)
305 Washington St SW
Blacksburg, VA 24060
H - 540-552-0682
W - 540-552-2473
E-mail: cooper.house@bev.net

Newsletter Editor and Membership Secretary (1993 ... No designated term)

Doug King
2800 White Oak Drive
Decatur, GA 30032-4346
H - 404-254-4528
C - 952-270-8134
F - 404-254-2631
E-mail: dougking2@aol.com

Bookkeeper (2003 ... No designated term)

Susan Robertson
9650 Clover Circle
Eden Prairie, MN 55347
H - 952-941-6494
C - 952-836-5058
E-mail: sumaclane50@aol.com

G.A. Booth Coordinator (2003 ... No designated term)

Vicki Moss
70-21 Forest Ave
Ridgewood, NY 11385
H - 347-907-9849
E-mail: luseana@mac.com

The next issue of *Network News*

will focus on the coming General Assembly, including analyses of issues and actions coming to the Assembly, responses by candidates for Moderator to our questions, and much more.

If you have news or comments you would like to add to the collection, please let us know!

Please contact *Network News* editor Doug King:
2800 White Oak Drive
Decatur, GA 30032-4346
Phone: 404-254-4528
E-mail: dougking2@aol.com

**Deadline for Spring issue is
April 20, 2008.**



The contents of this issue

The Other Inconvenient Truth: The Growing Gap between Rich and Poor

Introducing this issue: <i>Mind the Gap!</i>	2
Letter from Arizona, by Trina Zelle, Interfaith Workers Justice of Arizona	4
Presbyterians Advocate Worker Justice, by Kim Bobo, Exec. Director, Interfaith Worker Justice	6
A Hermeneutical Dialogue about Latin America, Gene TeSelle reflects on Bartolomé de las Casas	10
Union Busting: A Growth Industry, by Joel Foster	12
It's Time for "The King" to Do the Right Thing, by Noelle Damico	14
Across the Great Divide, by Darcy Hawk	16
All in the Working Family: the Witherspoon Society Heritage, by Richard Poethig	17
and more ...	
Witherspoon Events at the 218 th General Assembly	3
Review of <i>The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism</i>	20
Shannon O'Donnell reports from Jerusalem	22
Paul Capetz on "tempted as we are ... a Christological paradox"	24
Jake Young on the consultation on world mission	26

Ghost Ranch Week for Peace and Justice

July 28–August 3, 2008

See page 19

Network News

The Witherspoon Society of the Presbyterian Church
2800 White Oak Drive
Decatur, GA 30032-4346

Periodicals
U. S. Postage Paid
Decatur, GA 30030-2974
ISSN 0745-418X