

The Monthly Update

April 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Easter – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ! Some people don't understand the fact that the virgin birth, crucifixion & resurrection are central to our faith as Christians. The enemies of Christ certainly recognized this; Gulen Ahmed of the Amadia sect in the Muslim faith told his followers on his death bed, "In your war against Christianity, attack at the point of the Resurrection."

Skeptics have been attempting this for almost 2,000 years - unsuccessfully. "Apologetics" is the field of "defending the Christian faith." In one of my books *New-Life Witnesses* I examined – and countered - the four theories that were used to try to explain away the empty tomb:

The first is that the Pharisees stole the body. The reasoning was that the Pharisees got together after they had succeeded in having Jesus crucified to steal His body to forestall any attempt by the disciples to claim that He had risen from the dead.

The second theory is that the disciples did in fact steal the body.

The third attempt to explain away the missing body is called the "Wrong Tomb" theory. The reasoning was that everyone, in their grief and anguish, went to the wrong tomb.

The last and most sophisticated theory is known as the "Passover Plot." This idea is that a resurrection hoax would be perpetrated by Jesus. Since he knew there would be a coming confrontation with the Jewish religious leaders, he would stage it so as to appear to rise from the dead. To do this, he worked out an elaborate plan. When he spoke the code words, "I thirst," a sponge with drugs would be put to his lips, he would drink the mixture which would then put him into a death-like coma. In the coolness of the tomb, he would revive, push the stone aside and walk away so that His disciples would think that he had risen from the dead. This seems to be a pretty good explanation - until you examine the facts. First, is that when the Roman soldier pierced his side, blood and water flowed out. When asked about this, a surgeon remarked that this was a clinical sign of death and explained that the blood separates from the clear watery-like liquid and accumulates in the chest cavity. So for Jesus to fake this, he would have had to know this - some 1900 years before this medical reality had been discovered. This is reinforced by the testimony presented in an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, "Clearly the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound on his side was inflicted. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge."

Believing this is beyond rational possibility as are all of the preceding three theories.

Dr. Frank Morrison, a British journalist and an atheist, was determined to rid the world of what he called "the scourge of Christianity" once and for all. After aggressive research, he wrote a book called *Who Moved the Stone? - The book that refused to be written*; this was later published by Zondervan. Dr. Morrison himself became an enthusiastic follower of Christ.

And that is the good news of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – He is risen from the dead.

We would ask that you send a gift this Easter so that we will be able to maintain as high of a level of activism as possible, especially in the months leading up the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth. Our prime mission is to ensure our faithfulness as a church to Him who has called us. I thank you in advance for your help at this crucial time.

In His service,
Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

April 2007 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

"You leave out God, and you substitute the devil." -Winston Churchill

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The Good Stuff *Mercy Ships prepares to launch new hospital ship*

Mercy Ships Ministries is preparing to expand its fleet of hospital ships -- an expansion the founder of the ministry says will permit Mercy Ships to have an even greater outreach to those in medical need around the globe. The Africa Mercy is undergoing what is known as "sea trials" today, in preparation for service in the ministry's fleet of hospital ships. The ship is the largest non-governmental hospital ship and will double the medical capacity of all ships in the fleet. MercyShips.org says upon completion, Africa Mercy is tentatively for field assignment in Liberia. Mercy Ships founder Don Stephens says the ship -- "our dream of the future," he calls it -- will help spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. "This is a 500-foot-long, 80-foot-wide, 474-berth and 80-bed hospital ship that we are anxious to take deliver of to take to the neediest parts of Africa," says the founder of the Texas-based ministry.

Since 1978, Mercy Ships has operated hospital ships in developing nations in an effort to spread the gospel in word and deed. Stephens says the new ship means a significant increase in active outreach. "This ship doubles the capacity -- just talking about the medical services alone -- of all of our previous ships combined," he explains. "We firmly believe in not only speaking the Good News but doing the Good News. We've seen the tremendous benefit of doing the gospel as well as proclaiming the gospel."

In almost three decades of service, Mercy Ships has performed more than one-and-a-half-million services valued at more than \$600 million. More than 2,000 short-term volunteers serve with the medical ministry each year.

- Allie Martin, American Family News Network; OneNewsNow.com; March 28, 2007.

Of Interest.

+ *Methodist Bishops Pledge Cooperative Work, But Not Merger*

[This is of importance because there had been talk of the various denominations in the "Pan-Methodist" community merging, but this appears highly unlikely. In reviewing the priorities of this group it is interesting to note the heavy emphasis on socio-political activism with a somewhat leftist perspective with the usual calls to "end to the war in Iraq" with no thought of the welfare and freedom of the people there; focusing on "injustices shown to Palestinians" in the Israeli-Palestinian issue; a "living wage" with no discussion of getting an education and individual initiative; "health care" with a view toward universal health care which is, in reality socialized medicine; and HIV/AIDS with not discussion about sexual abstinence outside of marriage between a man and a woman as being the best solution to that problem. It would seem that there is an unfortunate lack of addressing spiritual matters that are at the core of individual needs and provide the solutions to many of the problems delineated in the group.]

Bishops from six Methodist denominations value fellowship and cooperation, but a merger of the churches is not on the horizon. The 62 bishops attending a once-every-four-years consultation March 11-13 made that clear when they agreed that the name of the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and Union should simply be "Pan-Methodist Commission." The commission, sponsor of the consultation, is composed of the UMC and the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal churches. At the Atlanta meeting, the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Union Methodist Protestant Church became part of the consultation for the first time. The bishops discussed some cooperative ventures with regard to children and poverty,

substance abuse prevention, higher education, and men's ministries. A committee was appointed to draft a statement calling for an end to the war in Iraq, and another group was named to write a letter on the Israeli-Palestinian issue emphasizing injustices shown to Palestinians. With regard to living wage, health care, and HIV/AIDS, the bishops agreed to write letters to national groups already working on these concerns and to link with local religious and community leaders addressing them.

- Alice M. Smith, Wesleyan Christian Advocate (UMNS); as reported in UMNewscope, March 23, 2007.

+ Normally we don't include information of a personal nature unrelated to our ministry of informing you of what is happening in the United Methodist Church but this seemed to be of such worthwhile importance that we are including it.

THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW YOUR CELL PHONE COULD DO.

There are a few things that can be done in times of grave emergencies. Your mobile phone can actually be a life saver or an emergency tool for survival. Check out the things that you can do with it:

FIRST

Subject: Emergency

The Emergency Number worldwide for Mobile is 112. If you find yourself out of the coverage area of your mobile network and there is an emergency, dial 112 and the mobile will search any existing network to establish the emergency number for you, and interestingly this number 112 can be dialed even if the keypad is locked. Try it out.

SECOND

Subject: Have you locked your keys in the car?

Does your car have remote keyless entry? This may come in handy someday. Good reason to own a cell phone: If you lock your keys in the car and the spare keys are at home, call someone at home on their cell phone from your cell phone. Hold your cell phone about a foot from your car door and have the person at your home press the unlock button, holding it near the mobile phone on their end. Your car will unlock. Saves someone from having to drive your keys to you. Distance is no object. You could be hundreds of miles away, and if you can reach someone who has the other "remote" for your car, you can unlock the doors (or the trunk). Editor's Note: It works fine! We tried it out and it unlocked our car over a cell phone!!

THIRD

Subject: Hidden Battery Power

Imagine your cell battery is very low. To activate, press the keys *3370#. Your cell will restart with this reserve and the instrument will show a 50% increase in battery. This reserve will get charged when you charge your cell next time.

FOURTH

How to disable a STOLEN mobile phone?

To check your Mobile phone's serial number, key in the following digits on your phone: * # 0 6 #. A 15-digit code will appear on the screen. This number is unique to your handset. Write it down and keep it some where safe. [If] your phone [is] stolen, you can phone your service provider and give them this code. They will then be able to block your handset so even if the thief changes the SIM card, your phone will be totally useless. You probably won't get your phone back, but at least you know that whoever stole it can't use/sell it either. If everybody does this, there would be no point in people stealing mobile phones.

And Finally....

FIFTH

Cell phone companies are charging us \$1.00 to \$1.75 or more for 411 information calls when they don't have to. Most of us do not carry a telephone directory in our vehicle, which makes this situation even more of a problem. When you need to use the 411 information option, simply dial: (800) FREE 411, or (800) 373-3411 without incurring any charge at all. Program this into your cell phone now.

This is the kind of information people don't mind receiving, so pass it on to your family and friends.

- Received by e-mail.

(UM) Bishops *United Methodists involved in march to end Iraq war*

WASHINGTON— People protested U.S. involvement in the war in Iraq at an event that included candlelit procession to the White House and the arrest of more than 100 people in an act of civil disobedience. "We are here tonight simply and resolutely to begin to end the war in Iraq," said the Rev. Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners/Call

to Renewal at the worship service March 16 at the National Cathedral. "This is not a protest. It is an act of faith." [No, it is a protest.] Wallis was applauded when he declared the war "morally wrong" and "an offense against God."

However, I wonder what his view are as to the hundreds of thousands of people murdered by Saddam Hussein's brutal regime, to include the dropping of chemical and biological agents onto innocent men, women, and children of the Kurdish people.

It is disappointing but not surprising that some United Methodists including the Rev. Kathryn Johnson of the far-left Methodists for Social Action, a sponsoring organization, and the Rev. Jim Winkler, executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, participated. It is reported that they lit candles for peace and placed them on the altar. I wonder how many candles they lit for the victims of Hussein's regime.

"This war is nothing short of evil," said Winkler opined, who expressed dismay that President Bush cannot hear his own people's dissent over U.S. involvement in Iraq. "The right thing to do is to bring our troops home," he said. I wonder if the Iraqi people who would be left at the mercy of the terrorists would agree?

Bishop John Schol, of the Washington Episcopal Area, was also a participant. "The bishops of The United Methodist Church have committed ourselves to pray daily for the end of the war in Iraq, and we have committed ourselves to acts of prophetic witness on behalf of peace," Schol said. United Methodists "cannot remain silent while American men and women in increasing numbers are being sent to Iraq to kill and be killed, while thousands of Iraqi people needlessly suffer and die, while poverty increases and preventable diseases go untreated," he said. One wonders if the bishop's understanding of Iraqi history started with the invasion of Iraq and focuses only on the misdeeds of the United States. It would be interesting to know what the bishop's perspective would be if he had lived in pre-invasion Iraq and faced the demands of that regime.

"War is never the answer," said Wallis further opined. I wonder if the people of the countries occupied by the Nazis and the Japanese in World War II would have agreed? Perhaps it would be interesting to ask the citizens of France, Norway, Poland, China, Malaysia, and the Netherlands if they would agree?

It is sad that the money put by the good people sitting in the pews of countless United Methodist Churches across the nation support political activism such as this? It would seem that these same religious leaders of our denomination might also have a concern about the spiritual welfare of the people in the Middle East instead of offering platitudes that are out of step with the realities of geo-political affairs.

There is such a missed opportunity here.

- Allen Morris with some information provided by Melissa Lauber, *UMNS*; Nashville {132}; Mar. 19, 2007.

+ Our friends with the Institution on Religion and Democracy have offered suggested resolutions you might take to your annual conferences. We offer this information from them below in the interest of getting legislation into your annual conferences that would strengthen the orthodox Christian faith and witness in our United Methodist Church:

The last round of sample resolutions for YOUR annual conference are now posted on our website www.ird-renew.org

These latest ones have been drafted by our friends at Lifewatch, the pro-life caucus within our denomination, and would have your regional United Methodist leaders directly petition the 2008 General Conference (the UMC's top lawmaking body) to move our denomination in a more pro-life direction.

These resolutions, as well as other important ones that UM Action has prepared on such important matters as the integrity of church membership, Just War teaching, human sexuality, and the politicization of much of our church bureaucracy, can be found at: <http://www.ird-renew.org/2007/resolutions>

Any individual member of a local United Methodist congregation can submit a resolution to his or her annual conference. But please act quickly! Deadlines for submission are fast-approaching and have already passed in some conferences.

Remember, even if a resolution may not ultimately be approved in your conference, it will inevitably spark discussion and debate, critically raising awareness before the 2008 General Conference. This is a very important goal by itself!

Yours in Christ, John Lomperis, Research Associate, The Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 682-4131; (202) 682-4136 (Fax)

2007 Sample Resolutions:

Lifewatch Resolution: Amend The Book Of Discipline's Paragraph On Abortion (161J)

This Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church hereby charges its Conference Secretary, using the entire rationale stated above, to petition, in a timely and appropriate manner, the 2008 General Conference to amend Paragraph 161J of The Book of Discipline.

Withdraw the United Methodist Church from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

This Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church hereby charges its Conference Secretary to petition, in a timely and appropriate manner, the 2008 General Conference to withdraw immediately the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries/Women's Division from the membership of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

Engaging With Islam

This Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church hereby calls on its members to educate themselves about how many of our Christian sisters and brothers, as well as global neighbors of other faiths, are persecuted by such extremist expressions of Islam and how we can support them through our prayers and our advocacy

A Call for Justice and Equity

This Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church hereby calls on the General Council on Finance and Administration and the 2008 General Conference to take disparities in the representation of different geographic areas into consideration while making decisions on adjustments to the number of our denomination's Episcopal Areas.

A Call to Responsible Stewardship

This Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church hereby calls for the budget of the General Board of Church and Society to be reduced by at least 25% in the 2009-2012 quadrennium.

Resolution on the Integrity of Membership in the United Methodist Church

This conference, for its part, affirms belief in a regenerated membership, with the high standards of Methodism, its doctrinal standards, its general rules for its membership, and the responsibility of pastors to nurture, lead, and discern in matters of that membership.

Resolution Supporting Human Rights and Peace in the Middle East

We reject punitive and selective actions against Israel; that we urge attention to all human rights abuses in the Middle East; and we offer prayerful support for all persons working for justice, democracy, religious freedom and human rights among every people in that region.

A Call for Political Inclusiveness

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church hereby recognizes that most public policy debates "do not strike at the root of Christianity";

Affirming Important Ministries

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church affirms the great value and importance of Christ-centered ministries that do not compromise biblical standards for sexual morality while reaching out in love to people struggling with sexual brokenness, including but not limited to homosexual feelings.

Affirming Just War Teaching

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church hereby recognizes that while faithful Christians may disagree about the justice of particular wars, most agree that governments do have the right and responsibility use military force in some situations.

In Support of Marriage

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church hereby affirms the United Methodist stance on marriage and support laws in our state that protect the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Methodist Resolution in Opposition to Human Cloning

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church hereby affirms its support for legislation in this state banning ALL forms of human cloning.

Reconsidering Our Support of the National Council of Churches

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference hereby calls on the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, the General Council on Finance and Administration and the 2008 General Conference to take steps to ensure that in the 2009-2012 quadrennium, the United Methodist Church contributes no more than 20% of the total income of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA from its member communions.

Reconsidering Our Unqualified Support of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church calls on members of the United Methodist church to prayerfully reflect on whether agencies of our church should continue their membership in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

In Support of Honest and Thorough Debate

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church hereby calls on delegates to the 2008 General Conference to work to ensure that plenty of time is allotted to thoroughly discuss the concerns related to our church's association with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), with delegates representing all perspectives having sufficient opportunity to be heard

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"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." -Ralph Waldo Emerson

Global Outlook

"I believe homosexual acts between two individuals are immoral and that we should not condone immoral acts. I do not believe the United States [military] is well served by a policy that says it is OK to be immoral in any way."

~ Marine Gen. Peter Pace

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Iran. Israel Middle East expert says regime change essential for Iran

Israeli author and Middle East expert Avi Lipkin says the recent seizure of 15 British naval personnel by Iran has only exacerbated tensions between Tehran and the West, even as the United Nations is trying to get Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program. Lipkin thinks regime change may be the only way to stop the Iranian nuclear program.

The Israeli author, who has been warning Christian churches about the Iranian threat for some time, now believes the crisis is coming to a head as Tehran steadfastly refuses to comply with the United Nations' demands. He says the world simply cannot afford to allow Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to build a bomb. "Because Iran threatens the world economy under this crazy regime of Ahmadinejad," Lipkin asserts, "I predict very soon that there will be intervention and that the Ayatollah regime will be replaced by a more democratic regime." Also, he says he believes the Israelis will lead the way, triggering a desperate response from the Iranians. "The moment the Israelis are back, the moment they arrive in the Straits of Hormuz, George W. Bush will have so many European allies he won't know what to do with them," Lipkin contends. Meanwhile, he notes, "The Russians and the Chinese were a part of the problem until now; I think all of a sudden they understand that they've got a very serious problem." In fact, China and Russia have already called on Iran to meet the U.N. Security Council demands over its nuclear program.

The Security Council agreed last Saturday to impose tougher sanctions against Iran, after that nation refused to meet U.N. demands that it halt uranium enrichment. But Lipkin is convinced that regime change is the only answer

to the situation. "It will indeed require an intervention to remove the crazy Ayatollah regime in Iran," he says. "The way I see it," Lipkin adds, "Israel will lead the attack because the Democrats have handcuffed President Bush." However, the author says the moment the Israelis "even look at the Iranians, the Iranians will shut the Straits of Hormuz, and within two weeks the world economy will collapse because there's no oil." Not even the Russians and Chinese would tolerate that scenario, Lipkin contends. According to his assessment, a number of nations would act to protect their interests, and the Iranian regime would ultimately be taken out and replaced with a more democratic government.

- Chad Groening, American Family News Network; OneNewsNow.com; March 28, 2007

Islam.

Since there is a high level of concern in world affairs today generated by Islamic factors this data is included for your information. I think it will help all of us to a better understanding of a force that is dominating the world stage today.

Subject: Scriptures of Koranic motivation for homicide bombings by Islamic fanatics

+ ***The briefing*** - produced by a little-known Pentagon intelligence unit called the Counterintelligence Field Activity, or CIFA - cites a number of passages from the Quran dealing with jihad, or "holy" warfare, martyrdom and Paradise, where "beautiful mansions" and "maidens" await martyr heroes. In preparation for attacks, suicide terrorists typically recite passages from six surahs, or chapters [actually "steps" or "progressions"], of the Quran: Baqura (Surah 2), Al Imran (3),

Anfal (8), Tawba (9), Rahman (55) and Asr (103). CIFA staffs hundreds of investigators and analysts to help coordinate Pentagon security efforts at U.S. military installations at home and abroad.

...internal Pentagon briefings show intelligence analysts have reached a wholly different conclusion after studying Islamic scripture and the backgrounds of suicide terrorists. They've found that most Muslim suicide bombers are in fact students of the Quran who are motivated by its violent commands - making them, as strange as it sounds to the West, "rational actors" on the Islamic stage.

Palestinian child pretends he's a suicide bomber: In Islam, it is not how one lives one's life that guarantees spiritual

salvation, but how one dies, according to the briefings. There are great advantages to becoming a martyr. Dying while fighting the infidels in the cause of Allah reserves a special place and honor in Paradise. And it earns special favor with Allah.

"Suicide in defense of Islam is permitted, and the Islamic suicide bomber is, in the main, a rational actor," concludes a recent Pentagon briefing paper titled, "Motivations of Muslim Suicide Bombers."

Suicide for Allah a 'win-win': "His actions provide a win-win scenario for himself, his family, his faith and his God," the document explains. "The bomber secures salvation and the pleasures of Paradise. He earns a degree of financial security and a place for his family in Paradise. He defends his faith and takes his place in a long line of martyrs to be memorialized as a valorous fighter.

"And finally, because of the manner of his death, he is assured that he will find favor with Allah," the briefing adds. "Against these considerations, the selfless sacrifice by the individual Muslim to destroy Islam's enemies becomes a suitable, feasible and acceptable course of action."

- Received by 3-mail.

+ ***The Life and Religion of Mohammed, by Father J.L. Menezes***

Father J.L. Menezes knew Islam up close: as a missionary in India, he devoted his priestly life to introducing that nation's tens of millions of Muslims to Christianity. In *The Life and Religion of Mohammed*, he left us the record of his appeals: a frank, honest, and exhaustively researched exploration of the life of the "prophet" of Islam, the development and contents of the Koran, and an introduction to various Muslim sects.

Working from the earliest Islamic sources, Fr. Menezes provides a complete account of Mohammed's life, from his days as a simple merchant to his triumphs as a leader of armies and revered prophet. Menezes delved so deeply into his subject that he was even able to describe Mohammed's physical appearance. He explains why Mohammed couldn't possibly be a true prophet, and reveals the true sources of his "revelations" [some think epileptic seizures].

Fr. Menezes could be writing about today's Muslim terrorists when he explains that "Mohammed posed as the apostle of God, the seal of the prophets; as the destroyer of idolatry; as preacher of one true God, and the reformer of morals: while his life is marked by innumerable marriages; and great licentiousness, deeds of rapine, warfare,

conquests, unmerciful butcheries, all the time invoking God's holy name to sanction his evil deeds, ordering prayers and alms deeds and at the same time propagating Islam everywhere by fire and sword."

Turning to the Koran, Fr. Menezes delineates the distinctive teachings of Islam, explaining the elements of the Muslim holy book that make it so difficult for Muslims to convert to Christianity -- and showing how the Koran, when read honestly and without Islamic preconceptions, nonetheless depends upon and leads to Christianity. [Note: The Koran portrays some of the real facts about Jesus Christ. Many Muslims are so taken with Jesus' goodness, they study the Bible and come to a saving faith in Him.]

The *Life and Religion of Mohammed* concludes with an "appeal to candor and common sense," inviting Muslims to think critically about their religion, and to embrace Christ instead. With Islam on the march everywhere and Muslims streaming into the U.S. in record numbers, the candor, common sense, and solid Christian faith of this book are needed more than ever.

Your guide into the dark mind of Mohammed [contained in *The Life and Religion of Mohammed*] includes:

- The bizarre circumstances of Mohammed's "revelations": "it was a painful sight to behold the nervousness of his features, the distortion of his countenance and the anxiety of mind portrayed on his face"
- How worldly ambition gradually blinded Mohammed's mind and overwhelmed his early searches for the true God
- How Mohammed borrowed many of his ideas of Paradise from contemporary Jews and Christians -- and mixed them with base and lewd imaginings
- How Mohammed again and again justified his rapine and licentiousness with new "divine revelations"
- Why Mohammed adopted -- and later discarded -- many Jewish customs and ritual observances
- Islamic tolerance: Mohammed let Jews and Christians live in his domains -- if they paid tribute and accepted second-class status
- Mohammed learned some things from heretical Christian sects -- and incorporated into the Koran
- The early history of Islam was just as bloody as the life of its founder and its history up to the present.
- The Koran doesn't limit Muslims to four wives, as is widely believed, but actually sets no real limit.

Nigeria. Faith Important in Nigeria as Presidential Election Nears

Even as the UMC in Nigeria welcomes its newly-elected bishop this month, the country prepares for a presidential election. This nation of more than 130 million people has a major split in religion. Half the population is Muslim, primarily living in the northern parts. Christians are 40% of the population, living mostly in the South. Adherents of traditional religions are the remaining 10%. After eight years of rule by a Christian, President Olusegun Obasanjo, all major parties are running Muslim candidates for the top office. Religion is a very important part of a Nigerian's identity, according to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. More than nine in ten Muslims (91%) say religion is the most important part of their identity. Of Christians, 76% say religion is most important. One's nationality, ethnic group, or identification with the continent all hold less than 10% of the population citing one of these as most important. While both major religious groups are unhappy with the country's current conditions (94% of Christians, and 97% of Muslims), they each are also split over whether Nigeria would be best served by a participatory government (51% of Christians,

50% of Muslims) or a strong leader (41% of Christians, 49% of Muslims). When asked about worldview, Muslims and Christians are more likely to disagree. The majority of Muslims have an unfavorable opinion of the United States (67%), while most Christians (89%) have a favorable opinion. According to the Pew Forum, "Christian-Muslim tensions have deepened" during Obasanjo's rule. It cites increased evangelistic efforts by Christians and the imposition of Sharia law by Muslims as heightening these tensions.

- *UMNewscope*, March 30, 2007.

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The best things in life are not things!