

Monthly Update

May 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In this Monthly Update, we focus on issues that are in the forefront of concern to our United Methodist Church and in our nation. Although these issues have happened in the political sphere, our church leadership has actively advocated in the area of “healthcare reform.” The other area deals with our spiritual heritage – Israel. In this latter area, I felt constrained to send a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (contained first in the May Update itself).

Speaking of Israel, following is an excerpt from a message released by the Israeli Embassy on the occasion of Passover. Note the message of concern over world conditions included.

A Message to Rabbis, Cantors, Educators, and Community Leaders
from Dr. Michael Oren, Israel's Ambassador to the United States

Passover 5770 finds Israel and the Jewish people facing some of the most monumental challenges in recent memory. While Iran strives, unimpeded, to acquire nuclear military capability, and its leaders swear almost daily to wipe Israel off the map, efforts to deny Israel the right to defend itself - or even exist - proliferate. Meeting these challenges will require all of us in Israel and the Diaspora to overcome our differences and unite as a people as we have done so frequently in our history.

In addition to the threats to Israel's security and legitimacy, Israel faces the challenges of peace. We have made unprecedented and far-reaching gestures to facilitate the resumption of peace talks with the Palestinians. Israel has pledged to refrain from building new settlements, from acquiring new territory for settlements, from expanding settlements territorially, and even from incentivizing Israelis to move to settlements. Israel has also frozen all new construction in Judea and Samaria for ten months - a move praised by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton as "unprecedented." Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has joined with President Barack Obama in calling for immediate renewal of direct peace talks without preconditions, and has agreed to a preliminary period of proximity talks that will serve as a corridor to direct discussions.

On the Jerusalem question, Israel's policy is that all residents, Arabs and Jews alike, have the right to build legally anywhere in the city, without prejudice. This is not the position of the Netanyahu government, but of every Israeli government going back to 1967. It was the policy of Golda Meir, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Rabin. With that, Israel understands that the Palestinians also have a position on Jerusalem and is fully willing to discuss it at the negotiating table.

Unfortunately, the Palestinians have refused to negotiate or even to prepare their people for peace. The Palestinian leadership persists in sponsoring the deeply slanted Goldstone report, which accuses of Israel of war crimes, in promoting violent demonstrations, and in glorifying terrorists.

Nevertheless, Israel remains committed to reentering the peace talks and moving swiftly to a resolution of all the core issues, including Jerusalem, and achieving an historic peace....

Of continuing interest is the attention given to a study on our denomination itself – authored by a renowned evangelical observer of our polity – Dr. Riley B. Case.

Again, I thank you your support and prayers. Without them, we could not do what the Lord has called us to in these crucial times. And please communicate to as many people as you can the crucial issues of our times. Continue to pray – as never before.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

May 2010 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

"You cannot legislate the poor into prosperity by legislating the wealthy out of prosperity. What one person receives without working for, another person must work for without receiving. The government cannot give to anybody anything that the government does not first take from somebody else. When half of the people get the idea that they do not have to work because the other half is going to take care of them, and when the other half gets the idea that it does no good to work because somebody else is going to get what they work for, that my dear friend, is the beginning of the end of any nation. You cannot multiply wealth by dividing it." ~ Adrian Rogers

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April 2, 2010

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Jerusalem, Israel 910 70

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

I offer to you greetings during this holy time of Passover 5770.

On behalf of millions of people in the United States of America, I wish to apologize to you for the way you were treated on your recent visit to our country. I as a Christian and an American am deeply offended by the shabby treatment that you have received from our own President. This reflects negatively on us as a country that we would show such disrespect for the leader of our best ally in that part of the world, and as we know you to be a brave combat veteran of Israel's fight against those who seek to destroy your country.

We show disrespect to Israel and to you at our own risk as Americans. But even more important is the immeasurable debt that we as Christians owe to the Jewish people. I firmly believe that the majority of our citizens support Israel, the brave stand that she takes for freedom, and the right to exist. I had sent an e-mail to friends expressing this.

From our state of Georgia, a friend named Helen wrote in response, "I also am very disturbed by Netanyahu's treatment...by Obama. And I agree—our own destiny as a nation may well be related to how we treat Israel...."

Also from another friend in Georgia, "Thank you so much for that and I will certainly pray. I also am ashamed of how the Prime Minister was treated--Obama wouldn't even do a public photo op with him--and every time I go to the (United Methodist) Women's Division meetings, I have to listen to all the anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian propaganda. In all the years of conflict, the ONLY side that has ever given any concessions has been the Israelis, and they didn't even have to do that. They won the war!"

In the message by your country's ambassador Dr. Michael Oren, he states, "Passover 5770 finds Israel and the Jewish people facing some of the most monumental challenges in recent memory. While Iran strives, unimpeded, to acquire nuclear military capability, and its leaders swear almost daily to wipe Israel off the map, efforts to deny Israel the right to defend itself – or even exist – proliferate."

The Bible tells us in Psalm 122:6 to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem"; I would add by extension "...and all of Israel"! The Bible also tells us that in the prophecy of Balaam's message from God for Israel said, "May those who bless you be blessed, and those who curse you be cursed." (Numbers 24:9b)

We are praying not only for the peace of Jerusalem and all of Israel – but also for you in your brave stand for freedom as leader of the Jewish state.

With my deepest admiration,

Allen O. Morris, Executive Director
Concerned Methodists

The Good Stuff Donations to Haiti Relief

When giving to relief efforts, it is important to give through credible sources. Following is the contact information for three of those we believe who can translate the most of your giving dollar into the greatest work in the field:

- Rehoboth Ministries, Inc., The Reverend Pritchard Adams, Home Office, 333 Hilliard Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28311
Telephone: 910/630-3730
- The Salvation Army World Service Office, International Relief Fund (Haiti), P.O. Box 630728, Baltimore MD 21263

Telephone: 1- 800-SAL-ARMY Websites: www.sawso.org or www.SalvationArmyUSA.org

– Samaritan's Purse, P.O. Box 3000, Boone, NC 28607-3000 Telephone: 828/262-1980

Website: www.samaritanspurse.org

Of Interest

+ *Religiously Marching for Immigration*

Overshadowed by the Obamacare vote, tens of thousands marched on the National Mall on Sunday March 21 for "Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR)," including numerous religious groups. Called the "March for America," sponsors included immigrants groups and labor unions, as well as ACORN, CodePink, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the National Council of Churches, and the National Association of Evangelicals.

Essentially the marchers want a rehash of the failed 2007 legislation creating a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants, which critics call "amnesty," as well as increased visa quotas, a guest worker program, and enhanced family reunification. New York Senator Chuck Schumer is pushing a Senate version, while Rep. Luis Gutierrez of Illinois is pushing the U.S. House version.

Oldline Protestant liberals naturally were prominent in the march, and the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill served as a staging area for demonstrators. "We saw the integrity of law enforced, but the integrity of individuals and persons forgotten," exclaimed Phoenix-area United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcano at a pre-march religious rally. (You can read my assistant Connor Ewing's article here.) She was bewailing a 2008 Iowa immigration raid. Officials of her denomination oppose any substantive enforcement of current immigration law and resist the imposition of new law. Carcano denounced "that despicable wall" along America's border with Mexico that has "brought a shadow upon this country as dark as night."

Does national sovereignty serve any providential role for the Religious Left? Apparently not. Bishop Carcano seems to oppose any kind of border protections. "As people of faith, we knew it was coming because the God we serve won't let walls of oppression and separation stand," she enthused about a bureaucratic slow-down in completing the long-discussed southern border fence. "The sea had refused to let those pillars stand," Carcano rejoiced over the destruction of a coastal border fence by waves. "If the waters of the sea could do that to the pillars, what could we Christians do if we let the waters of our baptism...topple the pillars of injustice?"

Apparently the Lord wants anyone to be able to walk across the U.S. border unimpeded. Carcano insisted that CIR's critics are opposing "the reign of God." It's not clear if the Religious Left believes the Almighty opposes national boundaries for any nation, or just for the United States. Either way, many of these religious activists assert that Christian compassion requires that all of U.S. citizenship's benefits should automatically be available to everyone of the world's over 6 billion people. It is a sweeping claim.

Joining the Religious Left at least as of last year is the once solidly conservative National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which has endorsed CIR and the "March for America." Some NAE voices are weary from combat over abortion and same-sex marriage and see CIR, like the NAE's environmental activism, as supposedly less culturally confrontational. The NAE's pro-CIR resolution, approved last year, recalls how the "Bible contains many accounts of God's people who were forced to migrate." And it insists that God's people must show a "generous spirit" towards the ostensibly displaced. (Read my colleague Alan Wisdom's analysis of the NAE stance here.) Regarding law enforcement and national security, the NAE resolution was somewhat dismissive of any "simplistic defense of 'the rule of law,'" and only grudgingly admitted "God has established the nations (Deut. 32:8, Acts 17:26), and their laws should be respected." At least the NAE grants more than the old Religious Left, which snarls at the mere mention of border fences. With similar brevity, the NAE acknowledged that some "communities now struggle with significant stress on infrastructures in education, health care, social services, and the legal system" because of immigration.

But the NAE breezily conflated legal immigrants with illegals, and failed to distinguish between economic migrants and refugees, even victims of religious persecution, whose plight presumably would merit NAE's special attention. The NAE also complained that current quota systems preclude enough visas for current labor needs, without explaining how this is true during a recession, or how greater immigration would affect current legally resident immigrants, not to mention others on the bottom of the economic ladder.

The NAE does not directly challenge national sovereignty or law enforcement as the old Religious Left does. But it does mostly repeat the Religious Left's mistake of confusing the state's responsibilities with the church's. The former providentially upholds the law, defends its people, and punishes malefactors. The latter offers ministry and grace to all persons. These two callings are not at odds. But the religious activists marching last Sunday, whether evangelical or oldline liberals, largely assume that governments must endlessly offer mercy and benefits to all comers without regard to behavior.

Traditional Christian teachings would recognize such an approach as anarchic and lacking moral perspective, breeding injustice for all parties.

A recent commentary from an NAE official could just as easily have come from the National Council of Churches, romanticizing the "sojourner," and insisting that "those who welcome strangers are said to be entertaining angels." Religious immigration activists commonly identify biblical heroes as struggling immigrants, by implication supposedly having violated the immigration laws of ancient Israel or Egypt. "We see the hand of God in the movement of peoples throughout history," this NAE official proclaimed.

No doubt. But is God opposed to any lawful restrictions on immigration? Has God provided clear legislative guidance on the best immigration laws for the modern United States? Does Christian compassion compel disregard of or resistance to current immigration law? Few of the religious immigration marchers on Sunday seem to have answered these questions very seriously.

– By Mark Tooley on 3.26.10

+ *Restructuring and United Methodist Decline – Learning from the Past – The Methodist-EUB Merger*

Through the Call to Action Steering Committee, a special task force put in place by the Connectional Table upon recommendation of the Council of Bishops, the United Methodist Church has a wonderful opportunity to re-align, restructure, and refocus itself for the coming years. The Steering Committee is working toward a new way of doing church, and will propose sweeping changes to the 2012 General Conference.

It is about time. The United Methodist Church is in trouble. In 1967, just before the Methodist-Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) merger, the two denominations combined reported 11,026,976 members. At the end of 2009 the merged church reported 7,774,420 members. That is a loss of over 3.25 million members in 42 years. The number of members the UM Church has lost in 42 years represents a number that would be larger than the total membership of any one denomination in the United States-except for the seven largest groups-reported in 2007. Had anyone told us in 1967 that the United Methodist church would lose an average of over 77,000 members per year every year for the next 42 years it would have thrown us into depression.

The depression is catching up. While many good things are happening in the church, at times the bad news overwhelms the good (especially in the United States). While reasons for United Methodist decline are complex, and while the malaise has affected in some instances evangelicals as well as liberals (or progressives), and while local churches have also been part of the problem, in the end responsibility for the vitality of any institution rests with the leadership. That is to say, it would appear the church has experienced 42 years of decline with the same kind of leadership operating from the same kind of theology with the same kind of institutional way of doing things. In the business world the stockholders would demand new leadership. This will not happen in the church, but the church can ask that the people who guide the denomination take the call for radical change with seriousness.

The starting point would be in the recognition of some of the more serious mistakes of the past. In the next few Happenings articles we will discuss some of these decisions, events, or actions. The purpose is not to be negative for the sake of being negative, but to point out misguided efforts in order that we might learn from them.

1) The Methodist-EUB merger.

There were many good reasons for supporting the Methodist-EUB merger of 1968-70-72. It was not the merger itself that was the problem. In some ways the church was victim of unintended consequences. But it is difficult to argue that against the proposition that the merger turned out badly.

Most of us supported the merger. For Methodist evangelicals the hope was that the more conservative and evangelical EUBs would bring a healthy influence and balance to the Methodists. That there was a difference between the churches is illustrated by a phrase from the preface of the Otterbein hymnal of 1890:

To be useful, a hymnal must express the peculiar type of Christian life characterizing the denomination it is to serve. The Church of the United Brethren in Christ emphasizes the necessity of Christian experience-experimental religion, the fathers would have phrased it-and recognizes revival effort as the characteristic phase of its church activity; hence, its hymnal must furnish ample expression for its full and varied Christian experience and large facilities for revival work.....

This comment would not have been made by any of the Methodist bodies of that time, despite the fact that many Methodist churches were no less revivalistic than the United Brethren. The difference was not in the way local churches functioned but in the leadership and the corporate culture of the two churches.

At the time of merger the more open, more relational, and less imposing institutional culture of the EUBs was simply eclipsed and discarded by the more liberal, more social-class conscious, and more dominating Methodist corporate culture. There never really was a merger. It was a take-over.

The EUBs had a strong Sunday school program. The S.S. enrollment of the EUB Church at merger was 94% of its membership. The Methodist S.S. enrollment was 68% of its membership. EUB S.S. literature was open to evangelical themes. The Methodist S.S. material was not. But in the merger the whole EUB educational enterprise and its way of doing education was shut down and incorporated into the Nashville way of thinking and doing. The whole EUB missions enterprise was shut down and moved to New York and incorporated into Methodist mission philosophy. The social action arm of the EUB Church was shut down and moved to Washington D.C. where it was dominated by the Methodist way of social action. The EUB youth program was shut down and moved to Nashville. The EUB women's work was closed down and moved to New York.

The EUBs gave up, in many instances, their camp grounds, their conference sites, and their conference offices. In local communities with both EUB and Methodist churches, there were a number of forced mergers, few of which really worked. The one contribution of the EUB Church in merger was the EUB Program Council which was incorporated into the merged church structure as the Council on Ministries. But it often did not work in the merged church--not on the local level, nor district level, nor conference level. It for sure did not work on the general church level. The Program Council in the EUB Church worked because agencies were willing to be coordinated and held accountable by an agency which held some authority. The general agencies in the new UM structure saw themselves as bigger and more important than the coordinating agency and refused to be accountable to that agency, or, for that matter, to anyone. In 2008 the Council on Ministries was voted into non-existence.

The EUBs gave up one of their two seminaries (Evangelical Seminary in Naperville) through merger. Their last seminary, United Seminary in Dayton, has been under pressure to merge or close. Former EUB local churches found themselves in a denominational culture where they no longer had freedom to use the best resources available to them. Women's groups were told they could not exist if they were not structurally linked with the Women's Division. Sunday schools were told they had to use the official denominational literature. Confirmation classes were told they could use only material that came from Nashville. Mission committees were told they could support only official denominational missionaries. No wonder former EUB churches experienced morale problems in the new church.

The EUBs for years had been given freedom of conscience in regard to matters like baptism. The EUB ritual contained a service of infant dedication and EUB churches were given assurances that EUB traditions would be respected and that their freedom to dedicate infants would carry-over to the merged denomination. This never happened. When inquiries were made as to what happened to these "promises," the answer was given that the people who made the assurances were not authorized to do so. In a few years the understanding of infant dedication as the EUBs had understood and practiced it was declared un-United Methodist. And within a short time to re-baptize, as many EUBs had, became a violation of the Discipline and a chargeable offence.

One small group of EUBs refused to enter the merger. 62 (mostly small) EUB churches in the Pacific Northwest knew that, given the extreme liberalism of the Methodists in their area, they would simply be crushed in a merger. They were given permission to separate. They formed a denomination, the Evangelical Church of North America. The EUB churches that entered the merger were swallowed up. The Evangelical Church of America (later joined to another small denomination) now has about 12,500 members.

One study of former county-seat (the more prestigious) EUB "first" churches in North Indiana revealed that of 27 churches studied 30 years after the merger, 25 had closed, merged, or were greatly declined. Less than 10 years after the merger the United Methodist had lost more members than the nearly 750,000 the EUBs brought into the merger. Many of those were former EUBs.

Are there lessons to be learned from the Methodist-EUB merger? There are: bigger is not necessarily better. When two churches merge, the practices, theologies, and traditions of both churches need to be taken into consideration. Promises made should be kept. The suppression of evangelical voices does not strengthen the church. Competition can sometimes strengthen a church's witness rather than hurt it.

Can these lessons be applied to the re-structuring now taking place?

– "Happenings Around the Church" by Dr. Riley B. Case; March 31, 2010.

+ *Pelosi Thanks Religious Left for Obamacare Support*

Speaker Nancy Pelosi was careful to thank the Religious Left for its ardent support of Obamacare before the fateful vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. “That is why we’re proud and also humbled today to act with the support of millions of Americans who recognize the urgency of passing health care reform,” she declared from the House floor. “And more than 350 organizations, representing Americans of every age, every background, every part of the country, who have endorsed this legislation.” She specifically cited the Catholic Health Association and the United Methodist Church for having lobbied Congress to “Say yes to health care reform.”

Pelosi’s website lists all the major pro-Obamacare groups to which special thanks are due. It’s mostly labor unions but also lists the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, and a coalition called Faithful Reform in Health Care that included Mainline Protestant agencies plus Jim Wallis’ Sojourners and the Islamic Society of North America.

A government take-over of America’s health care system is a long sought, messianic dream of many decades for the Religious Left. But the version of Obamacare that Congress approved is still somewhat of a disappointment to the true believers, who still insist that direct federal control through a single payer system is God’s plan for medical justice. “We are not finished,” aptly explained a cautiously pleased Jim Winkler of the United Methodist lobby office. “There is more work to be done in the weeks, months and years ahead to fulfill the need for health care around the globe.” As Winkler explained divine sanction for Obamacare: “Jesus’ ministry serves as an example and a call to serve the least and the last among us. He asked us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves — setting forth a faith grounded in God’s abundance, generosity and a capacity for love that knows no bounds.”

The Religious Left version of Jesus’ love is an unceasingly expanding federal welfare state that coercively seizes assets from one segment of society for redistribution to other segments, according to coarse political calculations, and with all the efficiency and compassion for which mammoth state bureaucracies are renowned. Traditionally, Christianity and Judaism have understood charity as voluntary expressions of love channeled primarily through families, religious institutions and private philanthropies, with the government called to do only what other equally important social institutions cannot do for themselves. But for the Religious Left, the state is God’s primary mediating institution.

According to the United Methodist Church’s official Social Principles: “We believe it is a governmental responsibility to provide all citizens with health care.” With all the theological and economic wisdom characteristic of the Religious Left, the United Methodists further declare: “Like police and fire protection, health care is best funded through the government’s ability tax each person equitably and directly fund the provider entities.” Apparently God endorsed government controlled health care in Ezekiel 34:4 when he told ancient Israel: “You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured.”

Of course, this divine admonishment could just as well be aimed at modern Communist Cuba’s government health care, where hospital patients commonly languish without food or proper medicine or even clean sheets, absent special bribes for officials or intense attention from their families. And it could also apply towards more democratic forms of socialized medicine in places like Great Britain, where patients must await approval for advanced medical techniques from rationing government regulatory agencies, sometimes too late. The Religious Left generally is not as interested in quality of result as in equality of result. Though even the latter proves elusive in socialized medicine, which creates its own new variations of inequalities and favoritisms, as politically determined by governments rather than private forces.

Naturally, Evangelical Left icon Jim Wallis of Sojourners was much relieved by Obamacare’s passage, although he also still dreams of more direct socialized medicine. “From the very beginning, more than a year ago, the faith community called on the president and Congress to follow three principles in health-care reform: that it be framed as a moral issue; that it provide coverage to all who need health care, and that the sanctity of life be respected with no federal funding for abortion.” Wallis claimed that Obamacare achieved all three goals, although his third claim is especially disingenuous.

Wallis is still distressed by many Americans’ continued resistance to government-controlled health care, which evinces America’s supposedly “poisonous political atmosphere.” Inevitably, he rehashed accusations that “anti-health care ‘tea party’ demonstrators” hurled racial epithets at pro-Obamacare congressmen. After all, what else could explain opposition to Big Government than racism as part of a larger “massive campaign of distortion and fear?” Wallis ominously opined that Obamacare will be “improved over time” and one “step” towards fixing a “broken system.”

Professional Religious Left activists like Wallis primarily see religion as an organizing tool for extinguishing private alternatives to state control of health care and virtually every other facet of human life. Obamacare, with its frustrating maintenance of private insurance, is an insufficient but a hoped for first step towards the eradication of private medicine and, the Religious Left inwardly hopes, ultimately of the private economy and private charity. After all, there is no salvation outside Big Government.

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

With one-sixth of the economy in his grasp, the President agreed to Stupak's deal: an executive order that would somehow negate the abortion funding in the Senate bill. It was meant to reassure wobbly Democrats that the administration would protect taxpayers from any involvement in the abortion industry. Unfortunately, it does nothing of the sort. Just ask Planned Parenthood. In an email to supporters (subject: "VICTORY!"), the organization brags, "We were able to keep the Stupak abortion ban out of the final legislation and President Obama did not include the Stupak language in his executive order." For once, FRC agrees with pro-abortionists like Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) who told the press that the executive order "doesn't change anything."

That's exactly what FRC Action was frantically trying to convey to pro-life Democrats when the idea surfaced on Saturday. In a flurry of calls, visits, and emails to the Hill, we warned members that this order would be worthless in the long run because it cannot trump statutory law. Even the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) appealed to Rep. Stupak to reject the compromise. Its legal experts were unanimously opposed. "The statutory mandate construed by the courts would override any executive order... only a change in the law enacted by Congress can... address this very serious problem." The Wall Street Journal seemed surprised with the deal. "...[O]f course," the editors write, "such an order can be revoked whenever it is politically convenient to do so." As an attorney, Bart Stupak would have known that this was an empty gesture on the President's part. More importantly, he turned away from beliefs and put that trust in the most pro-abortion President in U.S. history. Americans have come to expect this kind of betrayal from this White House--but they never expected it from the man fighting for life in his party.

The march toward a complete government takeover of health care is almost complete. As of Friday, the business community was already bracing for the hit. Caterpillar, Inc. reported that when the ink dries on ObamaCare, its health care costs will rocket to \$100 million. Others, like Medtronic, Inc., will pay for it in employees. The plan that was supposed to create jobs will force Medtronic to cut 1,000 of theirs just to soak up the heavy taxes, according to the Wall Street Journal. If House and Senate leaders believed the American people would forgive and forget by Election Day, they were mistaken. Right now, the bill's new taxes and mandates are scheduled to start hitting homes in the heat of the campaign season. Meanwhile, nine state attorneys general will do their best to fend off the federal invasion at their borders. In Alabama, North Dakota, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington, a collective lawsuit will launch the moment ObamaCare becomes law. Before then, Senate Republicans hope to have killed the plan's clean-up bill, which is headed their way as soon as Tuesday. With a stash of parliamentary procedures at their disposal, they plan to lob amendment after amendment at the chamber until Democrats cry "uncle." If the GOP succeeds, it would be especially irksome to House Democrats who agreed to vote for the plan on the condition that it would include their list of changes.

As devastating as yesterday's result may be, don't lose hope. If this debate proves anything, it's that the abortion movement is losing supporters by the millions. America is radically shifting in its opinion of the unborn--so much so that the only way Democrats could pass this bill was by putting a pro-life veneer on it. Those who ignore the people on this issue do so at their own peril.

- Family Research Council: 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001; March 22, 2010

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"It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless, minority; keen to set brush fires in people's minds..." ~ Samuel Adams

Global Outlook

"The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states of worshiping Almighty God agreeably to their conscience, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights." ~ George Washington

* * * * *

The World Council of Churches (WCC) Revisionism from the Religious Left

As we're celebrating the 20th year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, this piece is a stark reminder of what was happening in mainline churches and their ecumenical organizations at the time. It is not a history to be proud of. - Helen

Leftist church elites are fondly remembering the Fall of the Berlin Wall as though they could claim some credit for its fall. Conveniently, they forget their own complicity with the former tyrants of East Europe and the Soviet Union. "Christian hope and

perseverance contributed significantly to the fall of the Berlin Wall”, World Council of Churches (WCC) chief Samuel Kobia recently declared. True enough. Millions of Christians and other people of faith, despite persecution and martyrdom, endured for decades under communist rule. But their perseverance owed little to groups like the WCC and other leftist Western church groups, who cheerfully demanded appeasement of the old Soviet Bloc as the price for peaceful coexistence. These church leftists prioritized world “peace” over solidarity with oppressed fellow religionists behind the Iron Curtain, whose suffering was too inconvenient for ecumenical public attention.

Leftist church groups in the West during the Cold War’s final decades dealt almost exclusively with government controlled, or coerced, church groups in the East Bloc, pretending they were exclusively legitimate voices for Christians under communism. That these East Bloc church bodies had little to no freedom to disagree with communist platitudes did not bother “peace”-minded Western prelates, who cherished the photo ops, superficial good will, and faux ecumenical solidarity of East-West church relations. Besides, stopping nuclear war, U.S. imperialism, and the Reagan Administration were all goals that leftist churchmen in the West could readily share with puppet or intimidated churchmen in the East. “When we celebrate today twenty years of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the end of the cold war era, let us remember the faith and the courage of all those people who gathered in the churches and became the nucleus for the movement of change,” the WCC’s Kobia further commented, as if the WCC could seriously claim credit for Christian resistance to Soviet Bloc repression. “They taught us that Christian faith can inspire a resistance movement against fatalism and despair – a lesson which is as important today as it was twenty years ago,” he continued. Shamefully, Kobia’s words must mean little to victims of today’s tyrants. Today, as 20 years ago, victims of communist rule in places like North Korea and Cuba must still endure the silence, and even active collaboration of the WCC and its friends with the victimizers.

Kobia boasted that prayers and candle light vigils in East German Lutheran churches “inspired and encouraged people to confront the power of police and secret service in a very effective and peaceful way.” But the WCC was not the source of this resistance to communism. Unfortunately, the WCC et al had previously seen these East Bloc Christians, or at least their government approved representatives, as little more than stage props for opposing Western resolve and rearmament during the Cold War’s final years.

Proving that the WCC has learned nothing over the last 20 years, Kobia intoned that there are “still many walls separating humankind: the ‘Demilitarized Zone’ between North and South Korea, the ‘Security Wall’ on the occupied territory in Palestine, but also the walls of injustice, racism and prejudice that separate rich and poor, stigmatize persons suffering from HIV and AIDS and destroy the lives of many people.” Of course, Kobia and his fellow leftist religionists cannot distinguish between a prison fence and security fence. Nor can he differentiate between Marxism-Leninism, which deliberately murdered tens of millions, and unintentional global economic disparities. Revealingly, former WCC chief Konrad Raiser, in his own recent commentary about the Berlin Wall anniversary, carefully noted that groups like the WCC were discredited by their Soviet Bloc ties. “Ecumenical organizations came under scrutiny as well in view of their relationships with representatives of the former system and their lack of effective support for the struggles of dissident movements,” he admitted. “In some cases, ‘ecumenism’ even became a term to be avoided,” observing that the Orthodox churches in Georgia and Bulgaria withdrew from the WCC.

After the East Bloc fell, Romanian pastor Laszlo Tokes, who helped spark the anti-Ceausescu revolt, complained that groups like the WCC refused to “present the true conditions of churches Romania and [offered] a pretension that in our country everything is fine, the churches perform their mission in peace and freedom.” Meanwhile, he said, Romanian churches elites under Ceausescu’s boot obligingly misled the ecumenical movement and “under the label of ecumenism successfully represented the direct interests of an inhuman, ungodly and oppressive regime – all at the expense of their own believers.”

At least Roman Orthodox Church leaders, after Ceausescu’s fall, issued public “regret that under the dictatorship some of us may not always have shown the courage of the martyrs, and have not publicly acknowledged the suffering of the Romanian people,” instead “praying the obligatory tribute of artificial praise to the dictator.” The WCC offered less sorrow, only admitting its “mistaken judgment in failing to speak adequately” about Romania. More defiantly, the WCC’s then chief Emilio Castro, a long-time virtual fellow traveler, unapologetically opined: “What do we need to repent of if we were trying to help the Romanian people?”

Within hours after the Berlin Wall fell, United Methodist official Janice Love of the WCC’s Central Committee starkly warned against a “new-found triumphalism about capitalism” that is “uncritical, unwarranted and chauvinistic.” Naturally, she urged “more creative work” on “alternative economics futures for our selves in the United States as well as other parts of the world.” Love was speaking to United Methodist Council of Bishops, who were literally meeting as the Berlin Wall crumbled. The bishops dutifully commended East Europeans for “openness and growing self-confidence” while ominously warning against imposition of Western value systems. Bishop Rudigor Minor of East Germany told his fellow

bishops, meeting in North Carolina, that he hoped Marxism was not dead. “Marxism has insights into power that we can learn from,” he assured his colleagues, such as its critique of capitalism’s “competition structures.” He suggested Christians should remain alarmed about the free market’s “profit-maximizing at the expense of the Third World.” Admitting that Marxism as practiced in East Germany was a “flop,” Minor still hailed Marxism’s “utopian element” and assured his fellow bishops that, “Marxists are still relevant.”

Very few on the east side of the Berlin Wall agreed with the Methodist bishop. And fewer still have illusions that leftist Western church elites cared about oppressed Christians under the old Soviet Empire, any more than they care about today’s victims of remaining communist regimes or Islamic theocracies. Christians who suffer persecution and labor against tyranny around the world fortunately look to higher and more reliable inspirations than discredited Religious Left groups like the WCC.

– By Mark D. Tooley; Connor M. Ewing, Research Assistant; The Institute on Religion and Democracy

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"One father is worth more than a hundred Schoolmasters." ~ George Herbert