

Islamic Influences

While our church is eager to “seek dialog” with various aspects of Islam, we need to keep in sharp focus the radical differences between the Christian faith and those who believe something radically different. Islam is one of them. Even after the September 11th attack that was perpetrated against our country with no provocation whatsoever, our church leadership seems determined to bend over backwards to “find common ground” with the ideology that planned, organized, and carried out that attack. We can only wonder why? This issue of *The Christian Methodist Newsletter* covers two aspects of this and other actions affecting our United Methodist Church today. We offer them to you to examine for your information.

– Allen O. Morris

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Shall We Name the Name?

By Dr. Riley Case

The signing of the partnership between the United Methodist Committee on Overseas Relief (UMCOR) and London-based Muslim Aid raises a number of questions about how much the new value of “inclusiveness” compromises Christian distinctiveness. The UM’s and the Muslims have already laid aside 9.8 million dollars for joint projects involving tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka.

The partnership is unusual for several reasons. First, it was announced in the British parliament with references to how much good Christians and Muslims working together can do in the UK (our goal is to promote the good of the UK?) and the world, with further comments condemning “proselytizing.” Second, Muslim Aid, despite the fact that it must be considered “moderate” by Muslim standards, all the same has been accused of links with a number of militant groups and terrorism (see “Muslim Aid and Terror” 2/14/06 *Front Page Magazine.com*). In addition Muslim Aid sees itself working primarily with Muslim communities and publicizes the fact that one of its important “charities” is to help poor Muslim observe their religious holy days.

In the modern world it is necessary for Christian relief organizations to cooperate with all kinds of groups, secular and religious, political and non-political. Sometimes agencies sense they have been “used” for someone else’s political or economic agenda. All the same most Christian groups have sought to maintain the integrity of their Christian identity. Even if they do not preach or evangelize they do not deny the name of Jesus. Most churches, it must be assumed, who give to relieve suffering, give in the name of Jesus to honor the name of Jesus. *

Evangelicals, for one...take seriously that “whatever we do in word, thought or deed, we do in the name of Jesus.” We serve in Jesus’ name; we pray in Jesus’ name; we give aid in Jesus’ name. Most evangelical relief agencies operate under that assumption. World Vision, for example, with a budget about 23 times that of UMCOR, makes that philosophy fairly clear on its web page. It does this without being excluded from countries because of “proselytizing.”

The name of Jesus is seen as “divisive” in the modern world, which would prefer, like the British parliament, to conduct charity out of vague “good will.” Unfortunately, some (mostly “progressive”) Christians follow suit. Their prayers at public functions are not “in Jesus’ name” lest the prayers be offensive to non-Christians. The College of William and Mary, the second oldest university in the nation, raised up to train Anglican clergy, recently removed the cross from its chapel “in order to be more welcoming” to persons of other faiths. Schools started by Methodists to be Christian institutions became worried about sectarianism and identified themselves as “religious” instead of Christian, than as “church related” instead of religious, then as “historically-church related,” implying they were once that way but it has no relevance for the present.

[Is this the case? Are we going to lapse into a bland pseudo-Christianity, or are we going to name the Name and live the life that reflects a true Christianity? This may be the most crucial question of our time. – Allen Morris]

Final Study of Ministry report available online

After more than two years of study, a commission has issued its final report on its work to clarify the ordering of ministry within The United Methodist Church and recommends four more years of study by the church.

The Study of Ministry Commission report lays the groundwork for the church to reflect further on the theological, ecclesial and practical groundings of its system of lay, licensed and ordained ministry.

"We have proposed a new vision for the ordering of set-apart ministry," said the Rev. Mary Ann Moman, a commission member and associate general secretary of the Division of Ordained Ministry within the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

"We have spelled this out in the report, but we believe conversations are needed throughout the church to anticipate some of the consequences of following the road map we have set out."

Created by the 2004 General Conference, the 28-member commission sought to address ambiguity in the denomination's understanding of lay, licensed and ordained ministry. The panel is to bring its recommendations to the 2008 General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, which convenes next April in Fort Worth, Texas.

The commission has submitted a resolution to the upcoming General Conference asking that its report be referred to the church for ongoing study and conversation through the 2009-2012 quadrennium "for the purpose of clarifying the vision and building consensus." The resolution also calls for the commission to develop comprehensive legislation based on those conversations for consideration by the 2012 General Conference.

Eight recommendations

The 49-page report makes eight recommendations about the ordering of ministry, including separation of ordination from full conference membership. The final report is available at www.gbhem.org.

The commission also recommends doing away with the practice of commissioning - which it describes as "poorly developed intermediate steps" - and simply ordaining deacons and elders when candidates have met basic requirements. In addition, the commission calls for all current associate members to be eligible for ordination as elder and conference membership in full connection. The category of associate member would be discontinued.

Because nearly one-third of all pastors are presiding over the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion without ordination, the commission proposes expanding the range of those who qualify for ordination as elder.

Even with this expansion, the commission recognizes there may be times when circumstances demand "extraordinary ministry" - a term borrowed from Methodism founder John Wesley. Thus, the commission proposes that bishops may grant local sacramental authority in the place of appointments to those who are not ordained elder, but are approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry and appointed by the bishop.

The commission has not approved any changes in voting rights or General Conference representation of local pastors. "We believe the church should wrestle with the possibilities of the proposed road map before making such changes," the report says.

A complex task

Moman said the commission task was too complex to complete in four years. "The sheer number, qualifications and procedures related to the already existing offices of ministry in The United Methodist Church is one factor in believing the church needs more time to look at this issue before General Conference takes action," she said.

Another factor is the complexity of issues related to the theology of the church.

"...The theological foundations and the consequent practices of ministry within The United Methodist Church reflect fundamental differences in the ecclesiologies of our predecessor denominations that are Anglican, Catholic, Reformed, Pietist and Evangelical in heritage, and these differences have not been adequately addressed through the process of merger and union," the resolution states in its case for further study.

The commission plans to develop a study guide for use in local churches to further churchwide discussion, Moman said.

By Vicki Brown, United Methodist News Service report #389; Nashville; August 9, 2007; (615) 742-5470 or newsdesk@umcom.org. Brown is an associate editor and writer in the Office of Interpretation, United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

Transgender issue on Judicial Council's fall docket

The United Methodist Church's top judicial authority will again be considering questions about sexuality - including the case of a pastor who switched gender from female to male - when it tackles a full docket at its fall meeting.

The Judicial Council, the top court for The United Methodist Church, is scheduled to meet Oct. 24-27 in San Francisco.

At this year's Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference in late May, Bishop John R. Schol reappointed the Rev. Drew Phoenix as pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church in Baltimore. Phoenix, 48, had been minister at St. John's for five years as the Rev. Ann Gordon. After surgery and hormone therapy in the past year, the pastor changed his gender to male and adopted a new name.

Though the United Methodist Church bars self-avowed practicing gay clergy from appointment and does not support gay unions, the Book of Discipline says nothing about transgender clergy.

During discussion around "Phoenix" in the Baltimore-Washington executive clergy session, two requests were made for bishop's decision of law. The first asked whether a name change based on a change of gender identity should be listed in a category which requires no discussion or approval, or whether it should be placed under another disciplinary area that requires consent and recommendation by the conference Board of Ordained Ministry. The second asked whether transgender persons are eligible for appointment in The United Methodist Church. In his ruling, Bishop Schol wrote that "There are no paragraphs in the 2004 Book of Discipline that prevent transgender clergy from serving in an appointment."

Both of these questions are docket items for the council's fall meeting. The Judicial Council automatically reviews all bishops' decisions of law, as is required by the Book of Discipline.

Three resolutions from the Northern Illinois Annual Conference that deal with the openness of the church to all people are also on the fall docket. The resolutions - "Affirming All Families," "Conference Affirming Article IV of the Constitution of The United Methodist Church" and "Affirming Inclusiveness of the Church Concerning Membership and Participation in Accord with the Constitution of The United Methodist Church" - all address inclusiveness. One states a desire to "make it clear that the definition of 'status' in Article IV of the church's constitution includes heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and transgender status of single persons and persons who avow they are in committed, loving relationships."

The paragraph in the denomination's constitution deals with the idea that all people "are of sacred worth" and are fully eligible for participation and membership in The United Methodist Church.

The Judicial Council will review the Minnesota Annual Conference's approval of adding domestic partners of lay people to the conference's health insurance plan. (Asked to rule on a similar plan for the West Michigan Annual Conference, the council in Decision 1030 simply stated that each conference has the responsibility to make sure no church funds are being used to promote homosexuality as stated in Paragraph 612.19 of the Book of Discipline.)

Two annual conferences - Western North Carolina and Pacific-Northwest - have bishop's decisions of law questions related to Paragraph 612.19 in the Discipline, which forbids annual conferences from giving church funds to "promote the acceptance of homosexuality."

Other items on the fall docket relate to more traditional issues within the church including:

- + A question from the Committee on Nominations of the 2004 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference on the allocation of membership
 - on general boards and agencies of the denomination by the secretary of the General Conference;
- + A request from the Memphis Annual Conference as to whether or not candidates for election as delegates to general and jurisdictional
 - conference can be compelled to disclose their views on issues;
- + A question from the Memphis Annual Conference in regard to a conference policy entitled "Identifying and Strengthening Effective Clergy Leadership;"
- + A review of a bishop's decision of law in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference concerning the constitutionality of its plan of
 - organization;
- + A request from the West Michigan Annual Conference concerning the procedure for a vote for continuance of a local pastor's
 - licensing;
- + A review of a bishop's decision of law in the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference concerning whether procedures used by the
 - annual conference with respect to complaints comply with the Discipline;
- + A review of a bishop's decision of law in the Iowa Annual Conference concerning a paragraph in the Book of Discipline that deals with
 - conference benevolences;
- + A review of a bishop's decision of law in the South Carolina Annual Conference Concerning the legality of the standing rule for the
 - election of the conference secretary;
- + A review of a bishop's decision of law in the New England Annual Conference concerning the legality of the conference policy on
 - parsonages shared between local church clergy and conference staff;
- + A review of a bishop's decision of law in the California-Nevada Annual Conference dealing with "involuntary leave of absence,
 - administrative and judicial process, and voluntary or involuntary retirement;"
- + A review of a bishop's decision of law in the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference concerning confidentiality of supervisory files.

The Judicial Council's spring meeting will be held during 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

By Neill Caldwell, United Methodist News Service report #381; Nashville; August 6, 2007; (615) 742-5470 or newsdesk@umcom.org. Caldwell covers the Judicial Council for United Methodist News Service and is editor of the Virginia United Methodist Advocate of the Virginia Annual Conference.

Worth Remembering

Allah or The Lord Jesus Christ?

By Rick Mathes

The Muslim religion is the fastest growing religion per capita in the United States, especially in the minority races!

Last month I attended my annual training session that's required for maintaining my state prison security clearance. During the training session there was a presentation by three speakers representing the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Muslim faiths, who explained each of their beliefs.

I was particularly interested in what the Islamic Imam had to say. The Imam gave a! Great presentation of the basics of Islam, complete with a video.

After the presentations, time was provided for questions and answers.

When it was my turn, I directed my question to the Imam and asked: "Please, correct me if I'm wrong, but I understand that most Imams and clerics of Islam have declared a holy jihad [Holy war] against the infidels of the world and, that by killing an infidel, (which is a command to all Muslims) they are assured of a place in heaven. If that's the case, can you give me the definition of an infidel?"

There was no disagreement with my statements and, without hesitation, he replied, "Non-believers!"

I responded, "So, let me make sure I have this straight. All followers of Allah have been commanded to kill everyone who is not of your faith so they can have a place in heaven. Is that correct?"

The expression on his face changed from one of authority and command to that of "a little boy who had just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar."

He sheepishly replied, "Yes."

I...stated, "Well, sir, I have a real problem trying to imagine Pope Benedict commanding all Catholics to kill those of your faith or Dr. Stanley ordering all Protestants to do the same in order to guarantee them a place in heaven!"

The Imam was speechless!

I continued, "I also have problem with being your 'friend' when you and your brother clerics are telling your followers to kill me! Let me ask you a question. Would you rather have your Allah, who tells you to kill me in order for you to go to heaven, or my Jesus who tells me to love you because I am going to heaven and He wants you to be there with me?"

You could have heard a pin drop as the Imam hung his head in shame. Needless to say, the organizers and/or promoters of the 'Diversification' training seminar were not happy with Rick's way of dealing with the Islamic Imam and exposing the truth about the Muslims' beliefs.

In twenty years there will be enough Muslim voters in the U.S. To elect the President! I think everyone in the U.S. Should be required to read this, but with the Liberal justice system, liberal media and the ACLU, there is no way this will be widely publicized.

The author, Rick Mathes, is a well-known leader in prison ministry.

- Received by e-mail from The Reverend Ben McKee
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Thoughts for the Month

- *The Man who walks with God always gets to his destination.*

- *If you have a pulse you have a purpose.*

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Spiritually Speaking

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

- Matthew 5:13-15