



Presbyterian Voices for Justice

A union of The Witherspoon Society and Voices of Sophia

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GHOST RANCH SEMINAR

July 26-August 1, 2010

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

CONFRONTING THE STRUCTURES OF INJUSTICE

“We’re All in This Together: Confronting the Structures of Injustice”

Revival found at Ghost Ranch Seminar; resources suggested

by the Rev. Schaunel Stein Nagel, Hunger Action Enabler, Presbytery of Philadelphia

[9-17-10]

Each year, since around the year 2000, a week for peacemaking is held at Ghost Ranch, in Abiquiu, New Mexico, sponsored by both the [Presbyterian Peace Fellowship](#) and the Witherspoon Society (now in union with the Voices of Sophia, as [Presbyterian Voices for Justice](#). For the first time, I made the fortunate choice to attend this conference for 2010.

This year, during the week of July 26-August 1, I attended “*We’re all in this Together: Confronting the Structures of Injustice*.” This conference of peacemakers took as its starting place and theme the new Social Creed for the 21st Century, which was approved by the National Council of Churches in 2007 and as Presbyterian social policy at the 2008 General Assembly in San Jose. This newly worded creed updates and expands upon the original Social Creed, written by Protestants in 1908 as part of the Social Gospel movement and as a response to the rising of trade unionists. Our group watched a video about the two social creeds and heard lectures on their history and possible future purposes.

Two years after our denomination has affirmed this new expression of faith, which our congregations should probably be studying and thinking about how to put into practice (text and additional resources are available here, [gcmc.pcusa.org/ministries/acswp/social-creed/](#)), it was beyond timely for a concerned group to give it several days of attention and use it as a springboard to delve into a variety of key social issues. Christians have periodically observed that we need to attend a Revival, from time to time, as part of our faith practices. The challenging topics presented to conference participants, with which to wrestle as people of faith—including war, foreign policy, women’s experience worldwide, and economic issues—were definitely ones that could set a fire and spur me on in belief, struggle, and action, as in a Revival. One of the suggested texts for the gathering, *To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians*, studies the Social Creed for the 21st Century and includes among its essays one by each of the presenters of the conference, Drs. Grace Kao, Gary Dorrien, and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, and is available from the Presbytery’s Resource Center.

Dr. Grace Kao, Associate Professor of Ethics at the Claremont School of Theology, a position she recently took on, after having served as the Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Women’s Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, started the week’s thinking off with a unique and compelling presentation on some of the theological questions that arose after the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech by Seung-Hui Cho, on April 16, 2007:

Why was Cho remembered in certain media as a Muslim?

GA actions ratified (or not) by the presbyteries

A number of the most important actions of the 219th General Assembly are now being sent to the presbyteries for their action, to confirm or reject them as amendments to the PC(USA) Book of Order.

We’re providing resources to help inform the reflection and debate, along with updates on the voting.

Our three areas of primary interest are:

- [Amendment 10-A](#), which would remove the current ban on lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender persons being considered as possible candidates for ordination as elder or ministers.
- [Amendment 10-2](#), which would add the Belhar Confession to our Book of Confessions.
- [Amendment 10-1](#), which would adopt the new Form of Government that was approved by the Assembly.

If you like what you find here, we hope you’ll help us keep Voices for Justice going ... and growing!

Please consider making a special contribution -- large or small -- to help us continue and improve this service.

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Darcy Hawk

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- Given Cho's childhood faith upbringing being Christian and his disturbed language seizing upon Christian images, is there anything in mainstream Christian theology that demands either our scrutiny or careful interpretation?
- Why did certain voices following the Virginia Tech tragedy assign blame for the event to some perceived unfaithfulness of some segment of American society, a similar trend in a variety of other recent times of crisis?
- Is it possible to speak of God's blessings without speaking of God's curses?
- Why did American flags appear at memorials of those killed, when not all of the dead were from the United States?
- Cho having killed 32 others and then himself, members of the greater Virginia Tech community alternated between memorializing 32 and 33 dead, and there are questions of for whom is there space.
- In a world where fewer people seem to be "going to church," what becomes the form of the secular "funeral" or mourning?
- Virginia Tech's memorial service included representatives from more than one faith tradition and little explicit Christian language, so what is appropriate from Christians in the public sphere?
- Why did President Bush attend the Virginia Tech memorial service; why did Queen Elizabeth, visiting Virginia for the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown settlement, meet with Virginia Tech students; and in a world of a troop surge in Iraq and long-silenced voices of Native Americans, beginning with their meeting with the English in Jamestown, whose deaths warrant observance?

Dr. Kao later had the opportunity to continue to challenge listeners with an excellent presentation on Christian ethical thinking and war, which compared war realism ("you do what it takes to win," as possibly a stance of George W. Bush, and from a specifically Christian perspective, Reinhold Niebuhr); Holy War thinking (God authorizes war and is ultimately responsible for it); pacifism; just war theory; and "just peacemaking" (as developed by Dr. Glen Stassen of Fuller Theological Seminary and also the Presbyterian Church (USA); see the "Just Peacemaking Study Guide," store.pcusa.org/7027002024).

I have been exposed to a variety of classes and conferences presenting similar material, and Kao's presentation was by far the most detailed and serious of any I have heard, so that no perspective was presented as a caricature of itself, and several conference participants either appeared angry at Kao for a time, or concerned for her faith, that she would wade into just war theory. Obvious concerns about just war theory for Christian pacifists include, but are not exhausted by, its later development in Christian thinking, as compared to Christian pacifism; the "principle of double effect" (i.e. an "evil effect," such as killing civilians, is permissible, if it was a foreseen but not intended effect of a military action); the tension between using war as a last resort, and only entering into war when there is a reasonable hope of military success, for what has honestly been expected or prepared for by a nation becomes a question; and the lack of development within just war thought of what should happen after a war. Kao's presentation took all of this into account. Definitions, major components, history, and theology of just war theory were all extensively covered. Towards the end of her time, Grace Kao expressed, in earnest, "I am a pacifist," but clearly, she has also done her homework! To know what exactly it is you are rejecting, before going forward in thought and action, is wise. We further had the opportunity to discuss Christian baptism as a subversive act, for if as Christians, we truly believe that through baptism, we enter into a family or nation with other Christians throughout the world, regardless of other human divisions (cf. Gal 3:28), then does not any concept of "national interest" (as in war realism) pale in comparison to, for example, our relationships with and responsibilities towards Protestants and other Christians in Iraq and throughout the world?

Dr. Gary Dorrien is the Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York and was likely the lone non-Presbyterian (Episcopalian) in the room. Rich thought continued. Dorrien's lectures were, according to self-description, done without manuscripts. Speaking on United States foreign policy, he included thought on our activity in many areas of the world, clarified American imperialism, and offered the alternative view of multilateralism as a more consistent and productive ethic. In his lecture on economic matters, he spoke to the causes and reality of the global economic slowdown and called for greater economic democracy.

Dr. Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty is a Presbyterian minister of Word and Sacrament and teaches at Bellarmine University, a Roman Catholic institution, in Kentucky. The seminar group had been asked to read Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn's book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, and Hinson-Hasty started her talk on women's issues by leading us in consideration of some of the book's prominent content.

Extremely worthwhile reading, this book seeks to cover both the violent struggles and hope-filled opportunities of women in many nations. It presents startling statistics: that in current, modern-day slavery, there are more enslaved than ever in the antebellum transatlantic slave trade; and that more women have died, simply for being women, than have all the men in wars, in the 20th century. After the 19th century's effort to end slavery and the 20th century's effort to end totalitarianism, the authors offer the challenge for the 21st century's final word

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[Some blogs worth](#)
[visiting](#)

[PVJ's Facebook page](#)

Mitch Trigger, PVJ's Secretary/Communicator, has created a Facebook page where Witherspoon members and others can gather to exchange news and views. Mitch and a few others have posted bits of news, both personal and organizational. But there's room for more!

You can post your own news and views, or initiate a conversation about a topic of interest to you.

[Voices of Sophia blog](#)

Heather Reichgott, who has created this new blog for Voices of Sophia, introduces it:

After fifteen years of scholarship and activism, Voices of Sophia presents a blog. Here, we present the voices of feminist theologians of all stripes: scholars, clergy, students, exiles, missionaries, workers, thinkers, artists, lovers and devotees, from many parts of the world, all children of the God in whose image women are made. This blog seeks to glorify God through prayer, work, art, and intellectual reflection. Through articles and ensuing discussion we hope to become an active and thoughtful community.

[John Harris' Summit to Shore](#)
[blogspot](#)

Theological and philosophical reflections on everything between summit to shore, including kayaking, climbing, religion, spirituality, philosophy, theology, politics, culture, travel, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), New York City and the Queens neighborhood of Ridgewood by a progressive New York City Presbyterian Pastor. John is a former member of the Witherspoon board, and is designated pastor of North Presbyterian Church in Flushing, NY.

[John Shuck's Shuck and Jive](#)

A Presbyterian minister, currently serving as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Elizabethton, Tenn., blogs about spirituality, culture, religion (both



on history to be about ending global oppression, trafficking, and needless death for women, through a broad variety of means, which would include left/right coalitions and roles for the Church. Authors Kristoff and WuDunn suggest the model of William Wilberforce, who by the early 19th century, was a force in causing Britain to end its participation in a slave trade and emancipate its own slaves, even though there was economic cost for the nation. I heartily recommend Kristoff and WuDunn's book for all to read! This is all part of our calling to end hunger and poverty.

Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty supplemented her presentation of the reading with discussion on other personal experiences and related topics. First, she shared on her recent trip to the Kerala state in India, where she observed interesting blending of religious pluralism, an increasing life expectancy for women, improvements in sanitation and fighting poverty, mandated representation of women in the political sphere, and the effectiveness of women's cooperatives. Second, recounting that once, when pregnant, she was to deliver a sermon at a church, where she was physically unable to fit in and ascend the pulpit's narrow staircase, Hinson-Hasty asked where might women ostensibly have access in our churches, but the greater church culture still may need to change. She suggested some steps for creating a church culture that would affirm the full humanity of women:

1. Open, honest discussion of the circumstances of women, worldwide.
2. Mission as being and doing with.
3. Leadership as shared power.
4. Confession.

She described the church community of which she is now a part, in Kentucky, and how it is intentionally working towards these sorts of goals. Finally, by prior invitation, Hinson-Hasty had Grace Kao respond to the presentation, providing for multicultural insight on the topics.

As a conclusion to the conference, we were offered information about active partners with whom to continue the work that we had begun. These include:

- Industrial Areas Foundation community organizing organizations;
- Gamaliel Foundation chapters, which seek to build bonds of trust across racial lines and then encourage members to take action on behalf of issues which are chosen with special attention being given to the needs of oppressed minorities and the impoverished;
- Recently formed, specifically Christian organizations, including –
 - Beatitude Society (www.beatitudessociety.org/);
 - Center for Progressive Christianity (www.tcpc.org/template/index.cfm)
 - Faith in Public Life (www.faithinpubliclife.org/);
 - Institute for Progressive Christianity (www.instituteforprogressivechristianity.org/)
 - Network of Spiritual Progressives (www.spiritualprogressives.org/);
 - Plymouth Center for the Progressive Christian Faith (www.plymouth.org/about/plymouth_center.php);
 - Progressive Christians Uniting (www.progressivechristiansuniting.org/Progressive_Christians_Uniting.html)
 - There is work going on to unite the work of some of these organizations, under the name "Progressive Christian Initiative."
- Rev. James Forbes' Healing of the Nations Foundation (www.healingofthenations.com/), which is proposing an interfaith approach.
- Resources such as –
 - *Prayers for the New Social Awakening: Inspired by the New Social Creed* (a book from which several prayers were taken, during our time together at the conference);
 - *Tikkun* magazine.

Ghost Ranch continues to be a place of beauty, where in addition to my conference work, I enjoyed hiking, a gospel music concert, and the finale of the children's programs, each age group presenting on their theme of "Peace, Justice, and Families." What a week!

organized and disorganized), life, evolution, literature, Jesus, and lightening up.

Got more blogs to recommend?

[Please send a note](#), and we'll see what we can do!