

TRINITY NEWS

JANUARY 2010

Trinity Reformed Church
North Plainfield, N.J. 07063

Rev. David M. Taylor, Pastor
Ginger Smellie, Editor

Friends, we are always thankful that we live in a land where ideas, the freedom to express them, and the consideration of them is open to all. I worry sometimes when I read of the level of acrimony surrounding almost any subject today. Is this a cultural atmosphere worthy of our constitutional republic, or evidence of a degradation in the general arena of discourse?

A speech from "across the pond" came to my attention when researching the work of Dr. N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham, England, and the author of our current series, "*Simply Christian, Why Christianity Makes Sense*". The context is the Church of England and Dr. Wright's address to the House of Lords in the English Parliament. Some of this may seem alien to us, but are the trends that unfamiliar? Something to think about.

On a lighter note, think about our coming year and all the things we want to do. The future always has great promise, great challenges, and with the will of God done in ourselves first, and then in our world, great results.

Pastor Dave

Moral Climate Change and Freedom of Speech

speech in the House of Lords, February 9 2006

by the Bishop of Durham, Dr N. T. Wright

My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lady, Baroness Knight, for the opportunity offered by this debate to address some issues that have become urgent in our national life. It would be a mistake, my Lords, to give too much attention today to the complex puzzles surrounding the Danish cartoons and their aftermath, or indeed the trials of Nick Griffin or Abu Hamza. These belong within a larger moral and social landscape, and it is that larger picture we must examine.

What we face, my Lords, is 'moral climate change', comparable to other forms of climate change and equally dangerous. The 1960s and 1970s swept away the old moral certainties, and anyone who tries to reassert them risks being mocked as an ignoramus or scorned as a hypocrite. But since then we've learned that you can't run the world as a hippy commune. Getting rid of the old moralities hasn't made us happier or a safer. We have discovered that we do indeed need some guidelines if chaos is not to come again. But once the foundations have been eroded, where will you find firm ground on which to build new moral fences? Can we, as a recent correspondent to the *Times* suggested, invent and agree upon two or three basic moral standards out of thin air?

This uncertainty, my Lords, has produced our current nightmare, the invention of new quasi-moralities out of bits and pieces of moral rhetoric: the increasingly shrill and polymorphous language of 'rights', the glorification of victimhood which enables anyone with hurt feelings to claim moral high ground, and the invention of various 'identities' which demand not only protection but immunity from critique.

It was this messy but potent combination of neo-moralities, my Lords, that generated the Religious Hatred legislation of which your Lordships, rightly in my opinion, took a dim view, and whose key elements were narrowly voted down in another place last week. It is the same combination which has produced a world in which it is thinkable for a University Christian Union to have its funds seized, and to be denied the right to meet, because it will not allow non-Christians equal membership. Many other examples could be given.

But it isn't just the invention of new moralities that should concern us, my Lords. It is the attempt to enforce them – to enforce, that is, newly invented standards which are in some cases the exact opposite of the old ones. How else can we explain the ejection of a heckler from a party conference for questioning the government's stance on Iraq, or the attempted silencing of protests on the same subject in Parliament Square? How else can we explain the anxiety not only of religious leaders but also of comedians when faced with that dangerously vague and insidious Religious Hatred legislation? How else can we explain the police investigation of religious leaders such as my Right Reverend colleague the Bishop of Chester, or the Chair of the Muslim Council of Great Britain, for making moderate and considered statements about homosexual practice? And since the crimes in question have to do, not with actions but with ideas and beliefs, what we are seeing is thought crime. People in my diocese have told me that they are now afraid to speak their minds in the pub on some major contemporary issues for fear of being reported, investigated, and perhaps charged. My Lords, I did not think I would see such a thing in this country in my lifetime. All that such a situation can achieve is to add another new fear to those which minorities already experience. The word for such a state of affairs is 'tyranny': sudden moral climate change, enforced by thought police.

That is the situation, my Lords, which faces us now, nationally and globally. But the answer cannot be to repeat the old eighteenth-century slogans of 'tolerance', or 'freedom of speech', as if they were straightforward concepts that would commend themselves and bring us back to sanity. Part of the moral landscape we now inhabit is the fact that the Enlightenment modernism where those concepts found their home has crumbled under the postmodern critique where facts are reduced to spin, where the narrative of 'progress' has been shredded, and where personal identity itself is deconstructed and reconstructed at will. In that climate, we have seen 'tolerance' and 'freedom' reduced to mere licence – and then redefined so that we will not, any longer, tolerate dissent from the new party lines. Intolerant 'tolerance', my Lords, is one of the greatest obstacles to genuine freedom of speech.

Whose freedom are we talking about, anyway? Notoriously, the freedom of my fist ends where the freedom of your nose begins; and similarly the freedom of my speech is curtailed by the freedom of your honour, as the laws of slander and libel have always recognised. Part of the problem of 'freedom of speech' is that it tends to be the media who are most in favour of it – though they themselves often cheerfully censor information that cuts against editorial policy. Freedom of speech, my Lords, is useless if it is only selectively enjoyed, and if it is not combined with appropriate responsibility. If 'freedom of speech' is to be rehabilitated as a useful concept, it needs to be set within a larger context of social and cultural wisdom. We have to find a way through the postmodern morass, not in order to go back to Enlightenment modernism, but in order to go through and out the other side into the construction of a new world of civility and mature public life. For this, freedom of speech has to be reciprocal; it needs the disciplines of interaction, of patient listening and attention. And that, my Lords, is what you don't get when new moralities are invented overnight and enforced by policemen knocking on the door to see if you're committing a thought-crime.

Within the new world of civility for which we must work, we desperately need to take the religious dimension seriously and not wave it away as irrelevant. We are witnessing at the moment an increasingly shrill attempt to keep religion out of public life, to vilify and outlaw it, whether by the scorn of television pundits or by one leading figure last week reportedly declaring that anyone with a belief in an afterlife ought to be debarred from holding public office. To banish religion to oblivion on the grounds that there is such a thing as fundamentalist violence is like introducing prohibition on the grounds that some teenagers go binge-drinking. I quite see that some secular commentators are now dismayed to discover that neither Christianity nor the other great religions has withered on the vine as they had expected – indeed, as their ideology had demanded. But it is only these late-modern shibboleths, I believe, which are preventing us from realising that healthy religion and healthy public life do truly belong together and that the attempt to keep them apart leads to a dangerous vacuum which may well be filled by unhealthy styles of religion *and* by unhealthy forms of public life. All this is clearly visible in some parts of America as well as elsewhere. That is why we in the church are committed as a matter of urgency to working on public issues with the other great households of faith; I mention particularly the new Christian-Muslim forum launched last week, to stand alongside the Council of Christians and Jews, the Three Faiths Forum, and other such bodies.

In these initiatives, 'tolerance' is not the point. My Lords, I can 'tolerate' someone standing on the other side of the street. I don't need to engage with them. 'Tolerance' all too easily supposes that all religions are basically the same, and that all of them can be discounted for the purposes of public life. No, my Lords: 'tolerance' is a parody of something deeper, richer and more costly, for which we must work: a genuine and reciprocal freedom, a freedom properly contextualised within a wise responsibility, freedom not to be gratuitously rude or offensive, especially to those who are already in danger on the margins of society, but to speak the truth as we see it while simultaneously listening to the truth as others see it, and to work forwards from there. This is so in matters of religion; it is so in matters of public policy; it is so in matters of sexual morality; and it is so in areas where all those issues, and others, rightly overlap and interlock. And, my Lords, it is precisely that sort of wise, responsible freedom which is at risk if you're afraid that honestly held beliefs, clearly and respectfully expressed, are likely to get you into trouble with the law. My Lords, we must learn fresh wisdom, before the moral climate changes irreversibly, and the sea rises to engulf the moral lowlands where we presently live.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have helped out with the FISH Hospitality Program over the past twenty years. It would not have been as successful as it was if you had not stepped up to the challenge. Your volunteering made the jobs of the co-ordinators much easier, which in turn made my job easier.

There were many times, when our guests left on Sunday morning that I was thanked for all our hospitality during their stay with us. This was all due to your caring, sharing and hospitality. Thank you for making our guests feel so welcome. Hopefully, in the future, we will be able to join the program again as a hosting church.

Some of us have chosen to continue with the program and help out at other churches as needed. If you would like to continue volunteering, please let me know and I will have your name added to the list.

As a side note, we will be donating many of the linens. Ginger Smellie will be taking the sheets to be used as backing for quilts to be sent to Church World Services. The blankets and towels will be donated to animal shelters to be used as bedding for the animals.

Once again, thank you all for your dedication over the years to the FISH Hospitality Program.

God's Blessings,
Sarah Coppola





BROEK CIRCLE - will meet on Monday, January 11, 2010 at 1:00 p.m. in the Library Lounge.

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BROEK COOKS will have Beef Barley soup and Manhattan Clam Chowder available on Super Bowl Sunday, February 7th. An order form is on the bulletin board.

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JACOBA CIRCLE - will meet on Monday, January 11, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the Library Lounge. Miep Devries, hostess.

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WINTER CONCERT

Sunday February 28, 2010 at 2:00 pm

At

**Trinity Reformed Church, North Plainfield
(corner of Greenbrook Road and West End Ave)**

**You're invited to a concert of sacred, classical, jazz
and popular music**

**Tickets are \$15 per person if purchased in advance
or \$18 at the door**

Tickets on sale January 7, 2009

**Send payment to: FISH Hospitality Program, Inc
P.O. Box 170
Dunellen, 08812**

Or purchase tickets at the door

Who would have thought we are now looking at 2010? No matter what this New Year may bring, we cannot be fearful.

There is a hymn, written in 1831 by William Bathurst, after graduating Oxford, he became an Anglican Minister near Leeds, England. It is said that as he studied Luke 17:5-6 this text was written.

If your faith needs bolstering, make this hymn your own personal prayer.

"O for a faith that will not shrink,
though pressed by every foe,
that will not tremble on the brink
of any earthly woe.

A faith that shines more bright and
clear, when tempests rage without,
that when in danger knows no fear,
in darkness, no doubt."

Whatever hymn you sing, sing with all
your heart!!

Happy New Year!
Joan Beil





JANUARY, 2010

- 4. Robert Sheppard
- 5. Donna Zolkiwsky
- 12. Jason Jackson
- 19. B. J. Snyder
- 24. Norma Cornelia
- 31. Roy Jones

Prayer List

Please remember in your prayers, our friends and members who cannot be with us on Sunday.

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|--------------------|----------------------|
| Don Adams | Maryanne Longstreet |
| Joanna Agnone | Pastor Rosie and |
| Corey Coleman | and Dennis McLelland |
| Joan Cornish | Sally McGahey |
| Jim Dever | Joseph Nasella |
| Christopher Flood | Luke Nikorak |
| Cassie Forgash | Denis O'Hara |
| Jill Gaddis | Margaret Rubas |
| Belle Hayles | Resi Sheppard |
| Doris Hiebeler | Henrietta Wermann |
| The Kichula Family | Don Zolkiwsky |

All U.S. Servicemen and Women



Communion

As we begin a New Year blessed by God's mercy, we gather at the Lord's Table on January 3rd at 11:00 a.m.



"In Memoriam"



David Kichula
at rest, November 21, 2009

Marianne Clark
at rest, November 27, 2009

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER DEADLINE
Friday, January 15th



JANUARY

					FRI	SAT
					1. 	2.
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	8.	9.
3. 	4. Consistory 7:30 pm	5. Choir 7:30	6. Bible Study 7:30 pm	7.	8.	9.
10.	11. Broek 1 pm Jacoba 7:30	12. Choir 7:30	13. 7:30 pm Bible Study	14.	15. * NEWSLETTER Deadline	16.
17.	18.	19. Choir 7:30	20. Bible Study 7:30 pm	21.	22.	23.
24. 31.	25.	26. Choir 7:30	27. Bible Study 7:30 pm	28.	29.	30.