



TIA News & Notes

Winter 2003

The Newsletter of the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance

Volume 8, Issue 1

"GOD IS NOT A CHRISTIAN"

Bishop Carlton Pearson will address Annual Meeting

March 24, Monday, 7 p.m. at the Peace Academy

Islamic Society of Tulsa, 4620 S. Irvington

For daring to believe and preach that all will be saved, Bishop Carlton Pearson has generated controversy. Bishop Pearson's "gospel of inclusion," which he prefers to "universalism," has put him at odds with both evangelicals and many mainline Christians who hold that salvation is conditional on a faith decision for Christ. Bishop Pearson will speak of his faith journey at our annual meeting on March 24th.

"It's an important issue," Thomson Matthew, Dean of the School of Theology and Missions at Oral Roberts University, was quoted in the *Tulsa World* as saying. "If all are saved, why do evangelism?" Bishop Pearson argues that "the message the world needs to hear is not that people need to accept Christ to be saved, but that God loves them and has already reconciled them to himself."

Agenda for the meeting includes reports from the president and treasurer, election of members to the board, and honoring of founding member and spokesperson, Bill Wiseman. The meeting will conclude with Bishop Pearson's address and discussion.

CHANGE IN BYLAWS AND PROPOSED SLATE OF NOMINEES

Bylaws were amended by the board of directors February 20 to read that board members may serve 3 consecutive 2-year terms effective with the April 2002 enactment of TIA, Inc. bylaws.

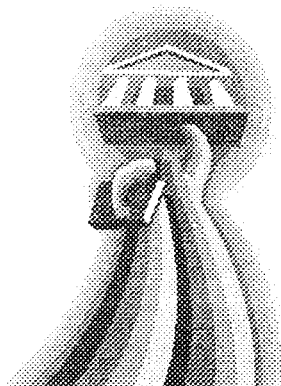
KEEP UP WITH ISSUES

The Tulsa Interfaith Alliance has had an e-mail alert/information service for several years. We use this service to disseminate information on issues affecting the separation of church and state, as well as peace and justice. We try to give information to our members that is not readily available elsewhere. We also inform our members of pending legislation and actions they may do to support our mission.

Recently we changed our list server to yahoo groups. The group is not interactive and only the moderator is able to make postings. If you wish to submit an article or item, include it in the body of an e-mail (no attachments please) and send to Barbara Santee at [sanitee@juno.com](mailto:santee@juno.com). If you wish to be added to the list, contact her with your e-mail address.

Proposed new board members to be elected at annual meeting

Barron, Mike - has accepted
Johnson, Arlene - has accepted
McArtor, Keith - has accepted



REPORT ON BIG BROTHER

Barry Steinhardt, director of the ACLU's Technology and Liberty Program, will speak on "The Growth of an American Surveillance Society" Saturday, March 22nd at 7 p.m., All Souls Unitarian Church, 2952 S. Peoria. Mr. Steinhardt will show that there are no longer any technological barriers to the Big Brother regime envisioned by George Orwell and that legal and political barriers are being systematically weakened in the name of homeland security.

INTERFAITH HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATION TO FOCUS ON WARSAW GHETTO & JEWISH RESISTANCE

"The Warsaw Ghetto and Jewish Resistance" will be the theme of this year's Interfaith Holocaust Commemoration, to be held at Congregation B'nai Emunah at 7 p.m. on Thursday, April 10th. The event coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The featured speaker will be William Donat, who was a young child when German soldiers pressed him and his parents into the Warsaw ghetto. During the Ghetto's final days, his parents desperately worked to secure a haven for him. A Catholic couple first harbored William in their apartment, then moved him to a Catholic church orphanage. Meanwhile, his parents survived the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and several concentration camps, and the family was reunited after the war.

ARUN GANDHI ELECTED CHAIR OF THE INTERFAITH ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

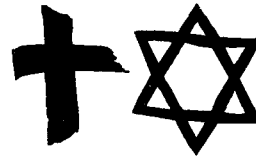
The Interfaith Alliance has elected Arun Gandhi, the fifth grandson of Mohandas K. "Mahatma" Gandhi, as the Chair of its Board of Directors,

"At this particular moment in history, when religion is often cited as the cause, rather than the solution, to conflict, Arun Gandhi's insightful and prophetic leadership is invaluable," said the Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, president of The Interfaith Alliance. "His family history and personal ministry contribute inestimably to promoting a positive and healing role of religion in public life, especially in establishing religion as a resource for conflict resolution."

NOTRE DAME THEOLOGIAN

"Challenges Facing the Church Today" will be the subject of a free lecture by Richard McBrien, renowned theologian, author and TV commentator, on Sunday, March 30 at 2:00 p.m. in the Tulsa Convention Center Auditorium, 6th Street and Houston.

Fr. McBrien is the University of Notre Dame Crowley-O'Brien Professor of Theology and past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. A book signing will follow the lecture.



SCHOLARS GROUP ISSUES STATEMENT ON RETHINKING CHRISTIAN FAITH IN RELATION TO JUDAISM

The Christian Scholarship Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, an association of professors in U.S. colleges, universities, and seminaries, has issued a statement calling on Christians to embrace a view of Judaism and the Jewish people that acknowledges that "God's covenant with the Jewish people endures forever." The statement, entitled *A Sacred Obligation*, points to needed reforms in Christian teaching, worship, and practice to replace the age-old "teaching of contempt" towards Jews with a new "teaching of respect."

The ten theses are as follows:

1. God's covenant with the Jewish people endures forever.
2. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a faithful Jew.
3. Ancient rivalries must not define Christian-Jewish relations today.
4. Judaism is a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development.
5. The Bible both connects and separates Jews and Christians.
6. Affirming God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understandings of salvation.
7. Christians should not target Jews for conversion.
8. Christian worship that teaches contempt of Judaism dishonors God.
9. We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people.
10. Christians should work with Jews for the healing of the world.

The Bush 'Faith-Based' Orders: Dangerous Decrees

On Dec. 12, President George W. Bush issued two executive orders putting into place his controversial "faith-based" initiative. The action met with criticism from newspaper editorial writers around the country. Here is a sampling of the reaction.

A Dangerous Hole In The Wall

President Bush punched a dangerous hole in the wall between church and state earlier this month by signing an executive order that eases the way for religious groups to receive federal funds to run social services.... The Bush administration's faith-based initiative has long been high on the wish list of religious conservatives. It allows churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious entities to qualify for tax dollars to finance programs for the poor and emergency relief, and it lets them provide those services in an expressly, even coercively, religious setting. While the initiative in theory bars federal subsidies for religious activities themselves, it clearly permits praying, proselytizing, religious counseling and other sectarian activities to be part of a program receiving federal funds. President Bush's initiative runs counter to decades of First Amendment law, which holds that government dollars cannot be used to promote religion. The White House claims money will not be used to directly support religious activities. But by financing religious people who provide social services in a way that includes religion, the program will be doing just that....

It is ironic that President Bush is working to tear down the separation of church and state at home, given the battles he is waging abroad. It is clearer today than ever that one of America's greatest strengths is that we are a nation in which people are free to practice any faith or no faith,

and the government keeps out of the religious realm. This is a tradition that has served America well since its founding. There is no reason to tamper with it now.

—*The New York Times*, Dec. 30

Taxpayer-Funded Evangelism

[Bush's] plan will be challenged, as it should be, in federal courts. It breaches the U.S. Constitution's wall of separation dividing church and state. The White House claims federal dollars won't be used to promote religious activities; it's hard to imagine otherwise.

Bush's order permits religious groups to dispense charity in churches, mosques and synagogues and by preachers, priests, rabbis and Muslim leaders. The religious setting, plus the hands-on presence of religious leaders, clearly carries religious connotations. Though Bush's program forbids religious proselytizing, there are no monitors to make sure that doesn't happen. The potential for mixing church and state runs high when religious groups become federal contractors. Many Americans, of course, would not object if federal funds went to their religious denomination. But what if their tax dollars went to a religious sect they didn't approve of? That's why the Founding Fathers, among other reasons, mandated the separation of church and state.

— Jan. 6 *News & Record* (Greensboro, N.C.)

Religious Discrimination

While Americans were focused on holiday preparations last month, President Bush issued a clearly unconstitutional order to give faith-based groups quick access to federal funds. He should withdraw it. If he doesn't, it should be challenged in court....

[T]he order would allow a Christian church to hire only Chris-

tians to run publicly funded programs offering social services. People seeking jobs funded with tax dollars could be rejected simply because they didn't hold certain religious beliefs, or because they were gays or lesbians. Such discrimination would be bad enough. But there's more: the rules say groups can even use public money in programs that include religious activities. Under the Bush plan, then, tax dollars could be spent on proselytizing. Bush needs to show greater respect for the separation between church and state, a central principle of the American democratic tradition.

— Jan. 6 *Kansas City Star*

Playing Favorites Among Religions

Lots of people seem to think that federal funding for faith-based charity violates the separation of church and state. It does. But there is another reason why Americans should be wary of allowing the government to have any financial control over our richly diverse religious traditions: Such funding allows the government to decide, essentially, what counts as a religion. President Bush's recent executive orders facilitating the flow of federal money to religion-based charities empower the government to dictate which cultures will be central to our society and which will be relegated to the social margins....

Bush has claimed that his government will respect the work of "every faith-based group in America," but so many would be unrecognizable as religious to him that it is difficult to know what this promised respect is worth. It begins to look as if the faith-based initiative program is just another way to ignore the poor and keep people of color in line.

—Karen McCarthy Brown, writing in the Dec. 24 *Los Angeles Times*

PRESIDENT PLAYS THE CHRISTIAN TRUMP CARD

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, President of The Interfaith Alliance
March 2003

President Bush often reminds me of a first year seminary student who, after one course in theology, thinks his particular view of faith answers all of life's most complex problems. As a Baptist minister for over 40 years, I hold sacred the beliefs and moral principals inherent in my faith, yet as a Christian I can tell you the President does not always speak for me, nor can he claim to speak for all Christians in America. Christians like all other people of faith are incredibly diverse in their thoughts and political ideas.

Just as religious leaders must refrain from trying to dictate the political beliefs of their congregants, political leaders must disdain the misguided illusion that they speak as prophets of God's will. It is not remotely within the realm of the President's executive duties to voice and advance particular sectarian priorities.

Yet at this week's National Religious Broadcasters convention, the President sat by and listened approvingly to himself being described as God's chosen man for this hour in our nation. He then made one statement that I find deeply disturbing: he linked an imminent American attack on Iraq to his understanding of Christian morality, saying that this attack would be, "in the highest moral traditions of our country". How can he say that when for four centuries Christians refused to serve in the military?

The President of the United States is the political leader of the nation, not the religious leader. Just as religion should not be a test for any political candidate for public office, religion should not be a tool of any political leader in a public office. In no way should the President of the United States politicize religion, or by the use of religious language from one particular religious tradition, alienate citizens from other traditions or no tradition.

The distinction that I see between the language in President Bush's statements and the kind of historic civil religion that had previously existed in America, is that President Bush is drawing from a very particular faith tradition, Evangelical Christianity, and is using that language to advance policies and to make arguments for the support of his various initiatives.

That language, whether used in statements to comfort, challenge, or guide the nation, leaves out whole segments of Americans who don't understand its meaning and who don't identify with, or in many instances even agree with, its substance.

Using this language, the President has escalated every issue to a kind of transcendent religiously-morally substantive subject. Through this language, the President is telling people who disagree with or question his public policies that these are not just political issues, these are moral issues. That's akin to playing the Christian trump card.

Democracy has been crippled. No longer can Americans practice healthy debate. By employing this language, the President has succeeded in framing every American who questions his policies as opposing good, good that ought to triumph over evil. When everything is absolutized in this way, debate stops: the moment there is a difference of opinion it's not just another idea, it's an expression of evil.

How dare any politician, including the President, even implicitly suggest that God is a kind of mascot for the nation. Affirmation of a particular faith tradition must never be made a litmus test for measuring patriotism.



Membership Categories are:

Student	\$15	Sponsor	\$500-999
Concerned	\$25-99	Benefactor	\$1,000-2,499
Supporter	\$100-499	Sustaining	\$2,500-4,999
	Patron	\$5,000+	

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Committees are:

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- _____ Resources - fund raising & finance
- _____ Public Education
- _____ Program Development - forums, etc.
- _____ Media
- _____ Legal
- _____ Rapid response/monitoring extremism
- _____ Assisting with routine office tasks.

Tulsa Interfaith Alliance, Inc. is an Oklahoma not for profit corporation and has received Internal Revenue Service income tax exemption under code section 501(c)(3). Membership dues are tax deductible. Membership in Tulsa Interfaith Alliance, Inc. consists of those serving on the Board of Directors or Advisory Board and all others who contribute financial support.

2003 MEMBERSHIPS NOW DUE

Tulsa Interfaith Alliance memberships are on a calendar year basis and 2003 memberships are now due. Please use the membership form printed above to renew your membership for 2003 or to join as a new member. Dues paid in the last quarter of 2002, however, can be applied to 2003 memberships.

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Membership in Tulsa Interfaith Alliance, Inc. consists of those serving on the Board of Directors or Advisory Board and all others who contribute financial support. Only members can vote in the election of directors and conduct other official business at the upcoming Annual Meeting.

**TIA SECRETARY PUBLISHES
SECOND BOOK**

Available at your local bookstore is Ted Foote and Alex Thornburg's *Being Disciples of Jesus in a Dot.Com World* (Westminster John Knox Press).

Subtitled "A Theological Survival Guide for Youth, Adults, and Other Confused Christians," Ted and Alex's book will be of interest to our interfaith constituency in its addressing the issue of religious distinctiveness in a pluralistic world.

Working with such provocative images as "faithful eccentricity" and "nonsectarian discipleship," this reviewer was reminded of Howard Thurman's comment, "I want to be me without making it more difficult for you to be you."

Ted Foote is the pastor of John Calvin Presbyterian Church, Tulsa, and secretary of the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance. Alex Thornburg is on staff of the First Presbyterian Church, Stillwater, working in campus ministry at OSU.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world..."
—Margaret Mead

Tulsa Interfaith Alliance
P. O. Box 4173
Tulsa, OK 74159-0173

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CONGRATULATIONS, EVA!

The Tulsa Interfaith Alliance celebrates the recognition that has been given member Eva Unterman, selected to receive this year's Pinnacle "Spirit" Award. Presented each year to commemorate Women's History Month, the Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women and the Tulsa Women's Foundation honor and recognize distinguished women for their contributions to improve life for all Tulsans.

<http://www.tulsainterfaith.org>

Tulsa Interfaith Alliance is developing a web page. It's a homepage with seven links to relevant areas of interest that TIA works on. We would love to have you visit and make suggestions to this work in progress. Until we are up and running, send comments to Barbara Santee at [sanitee@juno.com](mailto:santee@juno.com)

Contributing Editors:
Russell L. Bennett, Robert Lawton Jones
John Osborne, Barbara Santee, Judie Suess
Typing and Layout: Janet Storts

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