



"A NETWORK OF THE CONCERNED"

**THE WITHERSPOON SOCIETY
AND ITS CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH**

by

Eugene TeSelle

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This brief history of The Witherspoon Society was first published in 2003, with our grateful appreciation of the many women and men who have given so much of their time and treasure, as well as of their “energy, intelligence, imagination and love,” to carry on a prophetic witness within and for the Presbyterian Church.

We especially appreciate the service of Gene TeSelle in gathering vast amounts of information and shaping it into the meaningful story of this group during its first 30 years of existence.

We do this with special gratitude as we now, in 2010, celebrate the union of the Witherspoon Society with Voices of Sophia, forming the new Presbyterian Voices for Justice.

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The Witherspoon Society, organized in 1973, is often called the “liberal caucus” or the “Common Cause” of the Presbyterian Church. While there are a number of special-purpose organizations in the progressive wing of the church, the Witherspoon Society has tried to deal with all the issues and relate to all these kindred organizations.¹

The background and founding of the Witherspoon Society can be summarized with two images: “the Sixties,” with the many examples of responsiveness on the part of the church to the issues of the society, and then “restructure,” which brought a sudden crisis.

THE SIXTIES

In many ways “the Sixties” meant the release of a pent-up agenda that had been building throughout the Fifties. Many church leaders resisted the move to the suburbs and helped congregations in urban settings deal with increasing diversity in their neighborhoods. In 1954, desegregation in public education was championed by the PCUS just before the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the PCUSA, meeting just after the decision, made a similar statement. In the summer of that same year Moderator John Mackay issued the “Letter to Presbyterians” against McCarthyism.

There were many who wanted the church to have an impact not only in residential neighborhoods or in public policy but in the workplace and in the economy. One major project was the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR), directed by Marshall Scott for many years at McCormick Seminary, then by Richard Poethig. The Ministers in Industry component encouraged seminarians and ministers to work in factories in order to share the experiences of wage-earners, then talk theology with each other. The Chicago and Detroit Industrial Missions were ongoing ministries on the model of the French worker-priests.

Scott was elected moderator of the 1963 General Assembly, which turned out to be the Assembly that responded in a new way to the civil rights movement and its tactics of non-violent direct action, setting up the Committee on Religion and Race (CORAR). The next year Edler Hawkins was the first African American to be elected moderator. Scott and Hawkins became co-chairs of CORAR in 1964.² At a reunion of PIIR alumni in 1999 the participants came to the judgment that Scott and his followers were crucial figures in making a transition in the church’s relation to the society. They had begun with a broad range of justice issues, chiefly in relation to the workplace. As it turned out they supplied many of the activist ministers who

NOTE: Endnotes begin on p. 36.

moved in a more focused way into the civil rights movement, bringing much of the church with them.³ One of the noteworthy chapters of the civil rights movement came in 1963-64 when the Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race, led by Robert Stone and Gayraud Wilmore, organized a rotating presence of Presbyterians in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. This raised the consciousness of church leaders in the Midwest and the Mountain States, where a black presence was not strong. This broadened constituency turned out to be crucial in getting Congressional support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁴

As the struggle over civil rights intensified and division over the Vietnam war increased, the mood of many progressives changed. *Christianity and Crisis* shifted, around 1965, from “liberalism” with its “Christian realism” toward what could be called “leftist radicalism,” more explicitly directed against racism, sexism, and imperialism and contemplating basic transformations of society.⁵

It is difficult now to remember that “church renewal” in the Sixties meant liberalism, not conservative evangelicalism. The General Assembly authorized a study on the Nature of the Ministry, with parallel seminars for clergy and laity; these disclosed a widespread discontent with the clergy; perhaps because of these dissonances the committee’s report was received by the next General Assembly but its recommendations were not approved.⁶ A group called Renewal and Extension of the Ministry (REM) grew out of these seminars, organized by David Ramage and staffed by Earl Larson, with Maggie Kuhn as administrative assistant. Seeking to involve members as well as ministers in the mission and ministry of the church, it parented seven experimental congregations, usually without a traditional building but with a strong social ministry program.⁷ Presbyterians for Church Renewal (PCR) grew out of a young pastors’ seminar in 1967-68, characterized by

Bruce Tischler as “young pastors with a social activist bent.”⁸ It involved spiritual renewal to prevent burnout, training of laity, and defense of Self-Development of Peoples. Successive presidents of PCR included Robert Hudnut, Al Jeandheur, and Bruce Tischler.

In 1970-71 there was the case of the “Ambler Six” (including Bruce Tischler and Hal Lloyd, later joined by twelve others) were accused of disrupting a meeting of Philadelphia Presbytery and violating their ordination vows. They were adopted by Presbyterians for Church Renewal.

Because of PCR’s narrow constituency, it was felt that a broader organization would be helpful. Contact was made with a “Young Turks” group (including David Ramage, Bryant George, and Henry Borchardt) that gathered in Chicago at the time of Robert Kennedy’s assassination.

Many of the future leaders in Witherspoon were in elected or staff positions dealing with justice issues. Jack Yost was Chair of the Council on Church and Society, Dean Lewis was the director of the office, and William L. Yolton was a staff member. Dieter Hessel was a member of the staff of Social Education and Action.

It was a time of hope. The church was responding to the needs and challenges of the time. There were some who felt it was doing this too quickly, too uncritically, or with indifference to the conservatives and moderates who had trouble adjusting to the changes of the time. Still the church *was* responding, and in a prophetic way.

One of the significant institutional changes came with the approval of Overture H in 1965, which permitted agencies to have more than an administrative role and enabled them to carry out program functions of their own, including advocacy. With this change in the Book of Order the denomination could justify an office in

Washington, DC, to lobby Congress in concert with other denominations and other religious traditions.

RESTRUCTURE

“Restructure” was completed at the General Assembly of 1973. In one sense it was the undoing of the Sixties. In another sense it grew out of the characteristic Sixties emphasis that “the church is mission,” existing not as an end in itself but to be active in some combination of evangelization, service, and advocacy.⁹ This ecclesiology of “the church as mission” had been advocated by Johannes Hoekendijk, Paul Lehmann, and Arend T. van Leeuwen, often citing the later Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on “worldly Christianity.” Especially revealing, perhaps, is the odyssey of Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of South India, who was at first sceptical of it, then cautiously embraced it during the Sixties, and finally turned against it in a decisive way.¹⁰

The emphasis on mission was encouraged by the Confession of 1967, whose central section begins with the affirmation, “To be reconciled to God *is* to be sent into the world as [God’s] reconciling community” (C-9.31). This equation of church with mission was easily transmuted, however, into a rational, managerial approach that made the most of efficiency in organization and effectiveness in getting results; hence the term “Design for Mission,” whose purpose was to make structure fit the tasks that needed to be done. In the process it ignored existing tensions and suppressed any awareness of the need for political debate and negotiation (there had been an analogous movement early in the century with the “city manager” movement, which took a problem-solving approach as though power politics and interest groups could be made irrelevant).

A second impulse toward restructure was the

conviction on the part of some that the boundaries of presbyteries and synods no longer fit the realities of metropolitan areas; these seemed to have a social and economic force that must be met by corresponding unity and organization on the part of the church. Hence the plan for twelve regional synods, which were to become for the first time a major factor in mission, closer to the congregations and presbyteries and also closer to those who were being served. It also meant, of course, that many decisions that had been sequestered in the boards and agencies of the General Assembly were not only fragmented but were brought closer to the scrutiny of average members, many of whom had been unaware of what had been done by commissioners and appointed board members at the General Assembly level.

The vague discontent in the church was fanned by several movements founded, and funded, by J. Howard Pew, a consistent conservative in politics, economics, and religion. The Presbyterian Lay Committee was founded in 1965 to oppose the Confession of 1967 and the entire concept of the Book of Confessions; the *Presbyterian Layman* was begun in 1968, and it was sent to all church members whose names could be gathered. Ironically the *Layman* became the chief beneficiary of the Sixties ideology of participatory democracy and populist protest, setting itself up as the champion of all who were discontented in the church.

The watershed crisis came in 1971, when it was disclosed, shortly before the General Assembly convened, that an agency of the church had given \$10,000 to be sure that Angela Davis, a professed Communist, received a fair trial. The General Assembly and its leaders tried to handle the crisis as best they could, but there was no way it could be contained or managed. *Presbyterian Life* tried to explain the issue and print varied responses from the membership of the church; the *Layman* exploited the issue to the full, asking

whom to hold accountable and how to be sure that this did not happen again.

Congregations withheld their contributions to the general mission budget of the General Assembly. The fiscal crisis was intensified by the fact that the newly formed regional synods had to be staffed; as a sign of commitment to the new plan of organization the synods were given 100 percent of what they had been promised, while budget cuts of more than 25 percent had to be made at the General Assembly level. This meant that newly hired personnel, many of them women and minorities, had to be laid off.

John R. Fry noted the irony that the key term in the Confession of 1967, “reconciliation,” now functioned as an excuse for seeking peace and unity in the church, at the expense of advocating for justice in the church, the society, and the world.¹¹

THINKING ABOUT AN ORGANIZATION

During the Sixties, the boards, agencies, and staff members of the UPCUSA often led the church in progressive actions and statements. But this created a backlash; conservatives claimed that liberals, especially those in leadership positions, had been arrogant, dictatorial, and intolerant, and they began asking for changes in policy and more representation on decision-making bodies. An attempt was being made to “undo the Sixties,” and far-sighted staff people, led by Dean Lewis, saw the gathering clouds of conservatism.

It became clear that the progressive mood of the national boards and agencies, and their staff, needed to be supplemented by an “unofficial” voice from the rank and file of ministers and church members. It was at two meetings sponsored by the Office of Church and Society that a number of participants decided to form an

organization to keep up the momentum of social concern and support the efforts of embattled church agencies. Both meetings, one in November 1971, the second in November 1972, were held at the Krisheim Institute on Social Involvement in Mount Airy near Philadelphia. (This was an estate in Chestnut Hill that had been given to the Board of Christian Education and in 1977 passed to the Presbytery of Philadelphia; later it was given back to the Woodward family.¹²) Participants recall that the group developed two factions, one that wanted to work inside the existing denominational framework (including, of course, the Office of Church and Society), and another that went into the smaller dining room and drew up ideas on sheets of butcher paper for four hours, including the founding of a “special organization” that would be without the impediments of denominational politics. A major mover in this argument was George Stewart, pastor of an experimental parish called The Presbyterian Church of the Advent, one of the spin-offs of the Renewal and Extension of the Ministry group.¹³

An interim committee of about ten, hosted by Tom Castlen, gathered in Columbus. The name of John Witherspoon was chosen by the organizers because of its rich symbolism. In fact there had already been an East Coast group called the John Witherspoon Society, organized in 1959-60 by Robert Andrews, a campus minister at the University of Delaware, and Jack Yost, Chair of the Council on Church and Society.

John Witherspoon was noteworthy not only as the moderator of the first General Assembly in 1789. Before that he had been the only clergyperson to sign the Declaration of Independence, and he wore his clerical “tabs” throughout the deliberations of the Continental Congress; in both ways he was clearly advocating church involvement in the society of his day. In his native Scotland he had already

learned to distrust both Crown and Parliament, and he also opposed lay patronage in the churches; in America he saw and deplored the effects of the British government's long-distance tax policies. In his famous 1776 sermon entitled "Dominion of Providence," he linked religious and political freedom, saying,

There is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.¹⁴

It is not surprising, then, that Witherspoon was a teacher of James Madison, chief author of the *Federalist Papers* and of many features of the Constitution.

A call was sent out to gather at Lindenwood College in St. Charles, Missouri, in February. To share travel costs a voluntary pool was established. It was assumed that there would be a staff person with the title of National Coordinator. In the meantime Bruce Tischler acted as part-time staff with compensation of \$150 a month for six months, recruiting, developing support, and editing the *News Notes* that came out on an occasional basis. A number of persons agreed to give \$100 for start-up. By the time of the Lindenwood conference there were 104 members.

The call to the meeting, dated September 1972, was addressed to people "frustrated by the prevalence of institutional concerns and the slow pace at which the Church moves forward on the urgent matters before it," and the first objective was "To develop a network of concerned persons who are willing to work through the Church to implement the more urgent concerns of the General Assembly and to develop a strong corporate witness of the Church in society."¹⁵ (In future years a phrase taken from this statement,

"a network of the concerned," would become a shorthand description of the Witherspoon Society.¹⁶) A draft recruiting letter prepared by four members of West Jersey Presbytery mentioned the difficulties of "the ministry of justice and reconciliation" because of "the cutback in funds to the General Assembly agencies, the reorganization of Synods and the General Assembly, and the weariness and controversy that comes from working for social change."¹⁷

The 1974 report of the new organization to the General Assembly would strike the same note, saying, "Insensitive organization and the dilution of the offense of the gospel in popular religion threaten the faithfulness of the church." The stated goal is to "develop a network of concerned persons" [there is that phrase again!] willing to work through the church to "implement the more urgent concerns of the General Assembly," among which it lists "Committed and Equipped Christians, Communicating Our Faith, Combatting Racism, Youth, Justice and Human Development, World Peace, Family Life, and Women." As the report moved toward a conclusion it mentioned "the Church's involvement in justice and human development needs."¹⁸

ORGANIZERS IN SEARCH OF A THEOLOGY

Prior to the founding conference, three persons — Neill Hamilton, Dieter Hessel, and Joseph Dempsey — were assigned to prepare a set of theological reflections for the future "John Witherspoon Society," as it was tentatively called. Hamilton's draft spoke of captivity to the values of the culture and the widening gap between the "haves" and the "have nots," and went on to champion the Confession of 1967 and declare that "it is high time to recover that spirit with its promise of liberation for all people and nations."¹⁹ Charles West, however, questioned

Hamilton's facile condemnation of middle-class values and urged that theological options be left open, in the confidence that statements would arise out of reflection on common experience. He then went on to offer his own draft theological statement.²⁰

Dempsey thought that an attempt to elaborate West's suggestions would produce "an impossible donnybrook." He suggested two alternatives: either prepare a brief statement (less than 150 words) that would express the primary theological reasons for organizing a Witherspoon Society, or set theological statements aside and frame a statement of purpose that would directly address the "functional rationale" for the organization.²¹ Hamilton came back with a sharp reply. He thought that the purpose of the Society was "to prepare effectively for conflict on better terms than we have had before in UPUSA." He went on, "If we don't say something that calls out a party with common convictions, how shall we be better off than without a JWS?" There will always be those who work loyally within Presbyterian structures to implement their social concerns, he said, but he argued that political parties do not "get loyalty and action by vagueness." West's ideas, he said, sounded like "the Princeton strategy of 'the dynamic center' where the student body tends to be dominated by a conservative perspective regardless of what the faculty believe, and the dynamic center turns out to be 'dead center.'"²²

Like other founding members, Dempsey has continued to hold out for an organization that shows "courage and effectiveness."²³ Others, of course, have been concerned for a broader appeal, not exactly to the "middle," but at least to those in the church who have progressive inclinations but are reluctant to sound too ideological. This tension, real or perceived, has been present throughout Witherspoon's history, and it is not likely ever to go away.

No theological statement seems to have been adopted. While there have always been calls for theological reflection on current issues and for "vision statements" looking to the future, the Society has tended, if only by default, to follow Dempsey's second option, the more "functional" one. This is not to say that theology has been absent. It has often been a first-page topic in issues of *Network News*, the Society's periodical, in forms as varied as reflections on a church season such as Advent, analyses of current controversies in the church, or updates on liberation theology. Both Robert McAfee Brown and John Fry contributed from time to time. The periodical once contained a lengthy summary by Lettie M. Russell of a forthcoming book.²⁴

FOUNDING

As planned, the organizing conference of the Witherspoon Society was held at Lindenwood College, St. Charles, Missouri, February 16-18, 1973, with 120 in attendance.²⁵

The participants often broke out by the new regional synods, since it was anticipated that these would have an important program and policy role in the church (there was still uncertainty in one region, since New Jersey hesitated about joining New York and New England in a regional synod). Issues identified included national budget priorities, tax reform, quality education, residential desegregation, health care, amnesty and legal defense (this was still the Vietnam era), grassroots action to halt the assault on the Bill of Rights, and local church renewal (with "lay power" twice mentioned as an equivalent term). An initial goal was to have equal numbers of clergy and lay members.

After discussing a number of options, the group decided to incorporate as a non-profit corporation and to seek recognition as a "special organization" under Chapter 28 of the Form of

Government of the UPCUSA (after reunion, Chapter 9 of the Form of Government of the PCUSA). The plan was to elect five persons as the Executive Committee of a larger Steering Committee, which would be filled out by one representative from each of the regional synods in which there were at least thirty-five members. For a number of years representatives were elected from the synods, and they in turn were expected to recruit members and otherwise “organize” their synods. The five elected to the Executive Committee were Jack Yost and Jeanne Marshall, Jean Triplett and John Conner, and Bruce Tischler (the only one, he noted, without a first name beginning with “J”).

The Witherspoon Society was incorporated in the state of Ohio on the last day of December, 1973, with the following purpose:

To confess loyalty to God in Jesus Christ by bearing a present witness to Him through the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America through developing a stronger corporate witness of the church in society and a network of concerned persons who are willing to work through the church.

The incorporators, who were to serve as trustees until the first annual meeting, were the same five persons. The registered agent in the state of Ohio was Evelyn Reddin of Bowling Green, an attorney and elder, who prepared the incorporation papers. At the annual meeting in 1974 Rodney Martin was elected to replace Jeanne Marshall, and the five trustees later elected the following officers: John Conner, President; Rodney Martin, Secretary; and Jack Yost, Treasurer.

The purposes were expanded somewhat in the by-laws (termed “regulations” under the provisions of Ohio law):

We are committed by the gospel to peace, justice, and humanity as expressed in our confessions, to witness on a broad range of local, regional, national and international issues. Our witness, both in the church and in society, aims for renewal of the church’s life and focus, so that it may continue to be biblically and confessional faithful in the world.

By 1978 some specifics had been added (at least informally):

We are committed to

Implementing the mission priorities of the General Assembly.

Developing means of communication, reflection, mutual support and disciplined action in the church and the world.

Exploring new ways to express the Gospel as a liberating word.

Working for appropriate expressions of our concerns in common worship.

Encouraging theological reflection and expression.

Developing educational systems that equip us for mission in a changing world.

Seeking more effective institutional forms and ecumenical expressions of mission.²⁶

The founders of the organization had been prescient, for there were to be further moves to

A Stern Prayer for Parlous Times

Not every organization can claim to be celebrated in poetry during its birth pangs, but Witherspoon was different. During its founding time Ivy Dempsey, wife of Joe Dempsey, wrote six poems. She continues to be an active poet; a volume entitled *The Scent of Water: New & Selected Poems* was published in 2001 by La Alameda Press in Albuquerque (the title comes from Job 14: 7-9). She received the 2001 *Library Book for Poetry* sponsored by the Oklahoma Librarians and the Library of Congress.

A Stern Prayer for Parlous Times

Witherspoonian Lit. i

we all know how
committees orbit

beyond gravity besetting
planets and those human

measures Moses found
simply to love is

not politically astute
and we are sure enough

of sin in other men
to be political

at any cost and
that is why

we pray today
for grace and love

that we may be
at last some peace

in Christ's tired flesh
his church

Witherspoonian Lit. ii

"Presbyterian"
connotes severity

and order of a
legal kind

poems are out
(the Romans and

the Anglicans
took all) music

is marginal but
margins hold

the word and streams
and seas

in margins errors
are not fatal

we here are heirs
of grace perhaps

our politics are less
than perfect

being a-poetical
we might begin

to practice marginality
for music's sake

and find in wine
again the blood

that blooms where
brothers live in peace

Witherspoonian Lit. iii

It's a long way
from Eden to Philadelphia.

Our Book of Order is
a legal marvel and perhaps

we Presbyterians were made
to show necessity

of law for love. In any case
we are political: John
Witherspoon

the only cleric there to sign
the Declaration, and so on.

We know precisely who
we are in some dimensions,

mostly institutional. It is
a piece of Eden here.

Where are our gardens?
also poems. And music.

"A Mighty Fortress" is
foreboding, finally. Brothers,

we are together, partially,
And want a garden and

a song. And minds alert
for crime in the sweetness

of our pride in truth. May
be we will not find

a pastoral peace until we
purify ourselves. God send

us light for a window
opening in the mind

to regions of the real
lost in the trip

from myth to Calvin
and predestined hell.

God send us grace
for new perceptions,

for a power of sight
disclosing brothers everywhere

even in the Church
we must abuse until we love.

Witherspoonian Lit. iv

when the tribe is broken
the peace will die

we stand by the mountain
and it does not speak

wherever the brothers have lived
now ashes blow

how can we speak together
when the word is dead

no one can sing
before music is given

no one will dance
when the gods run away

when the tribe is broken
Yahweh is not heard

two men must hear him
before he will speak

two men must love mercy
before there is blessing

Witherspoonian Lit. v

the body of our Christ
broken is a lyre

for justice in our towns
for black school children
for farmers in Vietnam
for old people lost in time
for young men lost in fear

the body of our Christ
broken is a song for the world

God shames us in our deafness
to his flesh singing
to his bones dancing grace

Let us be a hearing
a burning motion for truth
a gift of harmony

For our sleeping brothers
For their silent dyings

Witherspoonian Lit. vi

the shape of Christ
is time
he has been lava

and great lizards
dying under snow
he is a city

and a pride
of lions innocent
before the hunter

sleeping in his
pride within
a glacial neglect

Christ in our clocks
turns in the
ghetto of our days

Kyrie Eleison
O Christ live
in our eyes

Kyrie Eleison
disclose for us
your flowering flesh

in love made
civil law in churches
habited in raiment

cosmically bright
we cannot drink
a heaven's cup

while babies
die with rats
from hate

Kyrie Eleison
make us the wisdom
seen in fools

who denounce dignity
and choose a comic
servitude for love

Continued from page 9

“undo the Sixties.” In 1973 the Stated Clerk questioned the right of the Advisory Council on Church and Society (ACCS) to speak on social issues such as the Middle East crisis, presidential war powers, and capital punishment.²⁷ In February 1974 the General Assembly Mission Council denied ACCS the right to speak without prior approval by the GAMC. At the next General Assembly, however, the right of ACCS to speak directly to the church was affirmed by a 417-207 vote of the commissioners.²⁸ In 1976 the Report from the Special Task Force on Structure Review recommended that the councils on both race and women become *advisory* councils, as ACCS already was, with no *program* functions. Witherspoon felt that any movement should be in the other direction.²⁹

Discontent with the current state of the church would continue. In July, 1976, the General Assembly Council adopted a plan for cutting \$3.5 million from the general mission budget. Witherspoon had several objections: “basic services” were called more essential than program or mission; “church and society” concerns were at the bottom of the priorities, along with youth, women, and criminal justice.³⁰ A letter from Witherspooner Jeanne Marshall, Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Church and Society, questioned the way priorities were determined and expressed concern that social witness and action might be nullified; attached was a copy of an article, without the author’s name (probably from *The Frying Pan*), saying,

All of the great UPC programs were killed in the 1973 re-organization. I have argued in other places that one of the reasons for re-organization was the desire to kill them.³¹

President John E. Clement wrote to the Program

Agency calling attention to the “Great Ends of the Church,” including “the promotion of social righteousness” (Book of Order, 33.04, now G-1.0200), and to the Confession of 1967, which calls on the church to labor for the “abolition of all racial injustice” (C-9.44) and says that the cause of the world’s poor is our cause (C-9.46).³²

ORGANIZATIONAL MAINTENANCE

The by-laws slowly evolved on the basis of experience. Dues for many years were \$25 individual, \$35 couple, and \$10 student, retiree, or limited income. In 1982 it was voted to let the Executive Committee set the dues, and these have risen to keep pace with inflation and the financial needs of the Society.

For a number of years the annual meeting was held early in the year; then a “general meeting” at the General Assembly was added. It soon became clear that the annual meeting was not sustainable. As early as 1975 a gathering planned for April at Mills College near San Francisco had to be cancelled and rescheduled for the General Assembly.³³ In 1982 the annual meeting was moved to the time of the General Assembly, and in 1986 the meetings were consolidated into one “annual meeting.” Conferences have been held, but with an emphasis on program, not on Witherspoon business.

The initial form of organization tried to strike a combination of administrative efficiency and representative democracy. The Executive Committee consisted of the officers: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson (after 1977, one for Membership and one for Representation, to function only when there was no staff Coordinator), Treasurer, Secretary/Communicator, Issues and Research Analyst. The Steering Committee consisted of these plus up to

Continued on page 14

National and Regional Meetings of the Witherspoon Society

February 16-18, 1973, Lindenwood College, St. Charles, Missouri

March 14-16, 1974, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois

February 27-28, 1976, El Rancho Inn, San Francisco, California, on the theme "Trivialization — Where Do We Go From Here?" with John Fry, Frank Heinze, and Robert McAfee Brown

March 11-12, 1977, St. Edmund's Conference Center, Cincinnati, with sessions on "Economic Justice and Our Food Policy," with Margrethe Brown and Richard Righter, and "Our Prison Crisis," with Maurice McCrackin

February 24-26, 1978, Krisheim Center, Philadelphia, on the Report of the Task Force to Study Homosexuality

February 1-3, 1980, Aldersgate Conference Center, Los Angeles, on the theme "Reverse the Arms Race!"

September 25-27, 1981, Fellowship House Farm, Saratoga, Pennsylvania, Eastern Regional Meeting on the theme "Christian Responsibility in the New Emerging Economy"

May 14, 1984, Hillside Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia, on "The Unity and Diversity of the PCUSA," with George Laird Hunt, editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook*, and Andrew Young, Mayor of Atlanta

April 5-8, 1988, National Gathering at Bergamo Center, Dayton, on the theme "Renewing Reformation: The New Statement of Faith and the Church's Witness Today"

April 18-20, 1990, National Gathering II, Embassy Suites, South San Francisco, California, on the theme "Integrity: Person, Community, Creation"

March 20-23, 1992, Flaget Center, Louisville, National Gathering III on the theme "A World in Crisis: Where Is the Church?" [cancelled]

April 16-19, 1998, Scarritt-Bennett Center, Nashville, Tennessee, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Gathering

February 3-4, 2002, Stony Point, New York, "The Hope of Reconciliation Today: Mission in the World and Wholeness in the Church," on the Thirty-fifth Anniversary of the Confession of 1967

March 6-8, 2003, Louisville, Kentucky, "The Call From Tomorrow: Whole Gospel Presbyterians Act in the Third Millennium"

September 16-19, 2007, Louisville, Kentucky, "Bcoming Neighbors: An Invitation to Global Discipleship," with speakers and resource people including Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick, the Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Rev. Roberto Jordan, from Argentina, who served on the drafting committee for the Accra Confession.

twelve representatives elected by regional synod organizations. All of them had annual terms, with a three-year maximum. In order to gain continuity and build on experience, terms of office were extended to two years after 1979, with a four-year maximum; later the maximum became six years.

In 1985 it was decided that those elected at the annual meeting would take office on the succeeding January 1, with the intervening six months functioning as a “training time” for new officers. There was still an Executive Committee, now consisting of the officers plus four at-large members, smaller than the Stecccccering Committee. The next year a symbolic change was made. Recognizing that Witherspoon had not been as effective in organizing at the synod and presbytery level as it had been nationally, the synod representatives were changed to “members at large,” elected by the entire membership. At that same time all these positions were consolidated into a single Executive Committee that took the place of the Steering Committee.

It had been assumed from the first that there would be a National Coordinator, and advertisements were soon circulated. In 1973, at a meeting during the General Assembly in Omaha, Alma Rhoades of Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania, was chosen out of a number of applicants, and the national office opened in the “Old Pine Street” church in Philadelphia. She was soon divorced, and as of December 28, 1973, Alma Rhoades and the office moved to the Rutgers Church in New York. Rhoades edited the *Network News* and attended several national meetings in behalf of Witherspoon. The next March, however, she became seriously ill and spent several months recovering. She was paid irregularly, and she resigned at the Steering Committee meeting on March 9, 1975.³⁴ Her period of service was a controversial one, since there were some who felt that she spent more energy on feminist issues than

Chairpersons/Presidents of the Witherspoon Society

John Conner, 1974-75
 John Clement, 1976
 Robert M. Gwaltney, 1978
 Otto Folin, 1979-81
 Shirley DeHority, 1982-84
 Bruce Tischler, 1985-87
 Judith Michaels, 1988-91
 Byron Shafer, 1992-93
 Rodney Martin, 1994
 David McGown, 1995
 Jeff Doane, 1995
 Eugene TeSelle, 1996-2000
 Jane Hanna, 2000-2
 Kent Winters-Hazelton, 2002-2004
 Kenneth Smith, 2004-2006
 Jake Young and Trina Zelle, Co-
 Moderators, 2006-2007
 Jake Young, 2007-2008
 William Dummer, 2008-2010

on other concerns of the Society. As early as November of 1974 the Steering Committee called for contributions to pay off a \$6,000 debt, mostly her salary and related expenses.³⁵ In 1975 the Steering Committee made it a priority to become financially solvent by the end of the year and to repay a \$2500 loan from Jean Triplett and Tom Castlen.

The office in the Rutgers Presbyterian Church in Manhattan continued to be maintained, with an answering machine to take calls. Lorraine Wilson of New York responded to mail and acknowledged memberships; when she moved from New York to San Marino, California, in 1975, Jessie Martin handled communications, and Wilson became Vice-President for Membership. In 1981 Treasurer Robb Gwaltney reopened the question

of the location of the office. He pointed out that it had been supposed that the New York address gave Witherspoon “the visible status of a national organization,” but he went on to suggest that it be changed to Elaine Wareham’s address in Fort Wayne, saying,

Perhaps, moving out of New York (!) will suggest that we are not as closely tied to 475 [475 Riverside Drive, the “God Box” where the National Council of Churches and several denominations, including the PCUSA, had their principal offices] as some might think and also might carry with it some ‘vibes’ that might lessen the impression of any big money that people might think we have [finances were in their usual crisis state].³⁶

Use of the Rutgers Church address ceased in February 1982.

Elaine Wareham of Fort Wayne, Indiana, was a key member of Witherspoon from the start; in fact, she had been active earlier with Presbyterians for Church Renewal. Soon she became the Membership Coordinator and Communicator

(she even owned her own mimeograph machine and sent out many of the records). She tended the Witherspoon booth at the General Assembly, made the hooked rug that was displayed at the booth for many years, and on one occasion, according to legend, provided a Bible for the Moderator, who had gone first to the Lay Committee and then Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns. (The full story, according to Robb Gwaltney, is that Bruce Tischler was sitting in the booth and reached into his briefcase for the Bible.) She was elected Secretary/Communicator in the mid-1970s and Vice-Chairperson for Membership in 1981.

It was Elaine Wareham who developed *Network News* as a vital organ for communication and remained an informal communications center. In 1976 she was the third recipient of the Witherspoon Society award. Late in 1982 the new position of Executive Secretary was created, and she was appointed to this post, without remuneration.³⁷

Wareham’s death soon after this, on January 5, 1983, came as an organizational as well as an emotional shock. Robb Gwaltney comments that it is difficult to suggest the impact that Elaine Wareham had on the life of the Society. She was at every General Assembly and was the public “face” of the Society; she was also the “glue” that held the Society together, he adds. All the other officers had jobs to which they had to attend, while she took Witherspoon as her “job.” “She was a fine theologian, a gifted organizer, a caring person, and a committed activist,” Gwaltney says. She died of an aneurism while she and her husband were watching a speech by President Ronald Reagan. She had just made a negative comment when she she turned her head the other way and, as Gwaltney says, “went to be with her many friends on the ‘other side.’”³⁸

Later that same year the Wareham Internship was

Editors of *Network News*

Alma Rhoades 1973-75

Elaine Wareham 1975-78

Andrew and Dorothea Murray 1978-80
(also the “in-house” *The Witherspoon Connection*, with budget reports, fundraising exhortations, and suggestions for organizing in presbyteries and synods)

Paul and Barbara Lucia, 1980-82

Jean Triplett, 1982-1987

Willem Bodisco Massink, 1988-1993

Doug King, 1993-

established in her memory, bringing a seminary student to the Assembly each year to observe its activities and work with the Steering Committee. Andrew and Dorothea Murray became volunteer Executive Secretaries, serving in that position until 1989.

Two months after her death, on March 13 death also claimed John Conner, another of the original Witherspooners, who had been elected moderator of the General Assembly in 1977. Director of the United Campus Ministry at Oregon State University in Corvallis, his imaginative sermons and his creative “poverty meals” had often been publicized in *Network News*. He was actively concerned about issues of peace, hunger, population, and economics, and a number of times he represented the UPCUSA at United Nations conferences. The Shalom Education Fund was established as a memorial, to be administered by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.³⁹

One of Conner’s monuments is the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, although he was not its sole author. It came out of a task force of the Advisory Council on Church and Society chaired by Bill Creevy that had met for several years. The report “Peacemaking: The Believer’s Calling” was sent by ACCS to the 1980 General Assembly. In preparation for that Assembly, Witherspoon helped to strategize and organize the effort for peacemaking. Forty presbyteries sent overtures to the 1980 General Assembly in Detroit, the largest number of overtures ever generated around a single issue.⁴⁰ The program was adopted in 1980 and was reaffirmed by the reunited Assembly of 1983.

ADVOCACY, WORK, AND PLAY AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A major part of Witherspoon’s activity from the start has been at the annual General Assembly. During Witherspoon’s first year it was agreed that

Presbyterians for Church Renewal would continue to monitor issues at the 1973 General Assembly in Omaha, but that Witherspoon would subsidize a large portion of PCR’s costs, since many people were members of both organizations.⁴¹ In the fall of that year it was agreed that PCR would be dissolved; any debts of PCR would be covered by Witherspoon; and activities at future General Assemblies would be organized by Witherspoon.⁴²

In October of the next year a coalition of “special constituency groups” met at the Witherspoon Society office in New York to discuss ways of advocating for social justice at all levels; these included the Asian Presbyterian Caucus, Black Presbyterians United, Church Employed Women, La Raza Presbyterian Caucus, National Farm Workers Ministry, Native American Consulting Committee, Third World Women’s Coordinating Committee, United Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association, United Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and Witherspoon Society.⁴³ The 1975 General Assembly authorized each of the Chapter 28 organizations (there were then about a dozen of them) to be represented at each Assembly by an “advisory delegate.” But there was already a problem: the Presbyterian Gay Caucus was denied status as a Chapter 28 group, and Witherspoon pointedly asked what qualifications were needed and whether all groups were scrutinized as closely as the Gay Caucus.⁴⁴

Witherspoon soon developed its characteristic format of activities for the General Assembly. Prior to each Assembly an orientation letter is sent to all commissioners, using a light touch while letting them know what to expect during the annual “drama” of the Assembly. Witherspoon members were asked to send “profiles” on commissioners to identify those most friendly to Witherspoon’s concerns; for many years these were compiled by Bruce Tischler. At

the beginning of the Assembly, Witherspoon has always tried to hold a “candidates forum” to hear the positions of the various candidates for Moderator. During the Assembly, members have observed the activities of the committees and prepared reports and memoranda, which in the early years could be laid on commissioners’ desks or distributed as they came through the door. The Witherspoon Award was inaugurated in 1974; it was first given to Maggie Kuhn, organizer of the Gray Panthers, at the “general meeting” in the Central Presbyterian Church of Louisville.

For some years it had been a tradition to hold an informal Witherspoon party in the basement of a local church. The first dance was in Baltimore in 1976, in the basement of one of the buildings of First and Franklin Presbyterian Church, with a band called “One Honky Too Many.” It soon became known as the best occasion for commissioners to relax. For several years it was called informally “The Bash” and officially the “Award Party,” because it was the occasion for giving the Witherspoon Award. The event has been inclusive of all ages, from old-timers to YADs, and of all sexual orientations; for many commissioners it has offered the first sight of gay or lesbian couples dancing together. At the 1978 Assembly in San Diego the dance was held for the first time in a hotel, with a cash bar, and the experiment was so successful that it became the precedent for all future years. At the 1997 Assembly in Syracuse, following the adoption of “Amendment B” (G-6.0106b), the dance saw the premier for lyrics written by Rich Thompson of Austin, Texas, to the tune of Cole Porter’s “When They Begin the Beguine.” It starts, “When they begin the regime of Amendment B,” and goes on to sing about “gluttonous tasting” and “the polluted earth we so long were wasting” and other sins condemned by Amendment B.

In 1979 the Witherspoon Society began to offer less expensive “alternative housing” for commissioners and visitors, usually at some

**Recipients of the
Witherspoon Award
(since 1992 the
Andrew Murray Award)**

1974	Maggie Kuhn
1975	George Cole
1976	Chris Hartmire
1977	Elaine Wareham
1978	John Conner
1979	Jeanne and Donald Marshall
1980	J. Robert Simpson
1981	Virginia West Davidson
1982	Jim Wright
1983	John Worcester
1984	William Gibson
1985	David McGown
1986	John Burkhardt
1987	George Chauncey
1988	Jack Wilson
1989	Dean Lewis
1990	Richard Killmer
1991	Elizabeth Verdesi
1992	George and Shirley DeHority
1993	Representative Eva Clayton
1994	William P. Thompson
1995	Laura Jervis
1996	Bruce Rolstad
1997	David W. Dyson
1998	Ed Loring and Murphy Davis
1999	Trina Zelle
2000	Rod Martin
2001	George and Jean Edwards
2002	Kathy Lancaster
2003	Dr. Jack Rogers
2004	Dr. Douglas Ottati
2006	Anne Barstow and Tom Driver
2008	The Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick
2010	Ann and Manley Olson

distance from the convention center and its hotels. This was done on the general principle of simplicity or austerity of lifestyle, but in that year it was organized specifically to observe the boycott of states that had not approved the Equal Rights Amendment (alternative housing was sought in Kansas rather than Missouri).⁴⁵ Usually the sites were Catholic retreat centers, or colleges or universities. In Philadelphia in 1989, at the 200th General Assembly, alternative housing was at the Divine Tracy Hotel, founded by Father and Mother Divine. In some years the conservative Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns made use of alternative housing through Witherspoon, too.⁴⁶ As the issue of homosexuality intensified, one of the concerns was to provide information on housing that would be either gay-owned or supportive of gays and lesbians.⁴⁷ At some point in the 1990s the Office of the General Assembly began arranging for alternative housing, and thus Witherspoon's innovation became fully institutionalized.

In 1996 the Witherspoon Society held the first of its Pre-Assembly Orientations on Saturday morning, prior to the beginning of the Assembly. It was prefaced by a brief appearance of the moderatorial candidates, before they had their group picture and went to their hospitality booths. The purposes of the orientation were to offer a preview of major issues coming before the Assembly and to give commissioners a sense of how the committees and floor debate would work. The most time was devoted to the first, with a "cafeteria" of presenters going through a series of major issues, since this was what most commissioners wanted to hear. How to orient commissioners to the fine points of committee work was a more difficult question. In various years there were experiments with presentations and role-playing, but what turned out to be most effective was Sylvia Thorson-Smith's "ten tips," from a frankly feminist perspective, on what to watch for in committee dynamics. Within a few years it was decided to invite a motivational

speaker at the beginning of the event — former moderator John Fife in 1999, and in 2000 Barbara Dua, who resigned her position with the Women's Ministries Program Area after attacks from the *Layman* and the initiation of a hostile review process.

In 2001 there was a change in the Assembly schedule, adding a required event for commissioners on Saturday morning. The orientation had to be moved to Friday night, and it was decided to seat commissioners by tables, according to the Assembly committees they had been assigned, so that they could meet each other and get a preview of the business they would be considering. This also meant that the motivational speaker became even more important, and concern about committee dynamics was almost reduced to a handout containing "Sylvia's Top Ten Tips." This format, while shorter, may be as effective as the other, since commissioners got a head start on their own committees' dynamics.

THE "ORDINATION QUESTION"

Sexual orientation was first mentioned in the PCUS, the "Southern church," in 1970, when its General Assembly urged decriminalization of same-sex acts between consenting adults and called for an end to discrimination. In 1974 David Bailey Sindt invited others to join him in forming the Presbyterian Gay Caucus. This group sought the General Assembly's approval as a Chapter 28 organization in 1975 and was refused. The question whether to ordain homosexual persons was formally raised in 1976, when New York City and Palisades Presbyteries requested "definitive guidance" on how to proceed with candidates who were qualified for ministry but also affirmed their homosexual identity and practice.⁴⁸

The Witherspoon Society let the Presbyterian Gay

Caucus use its booth during the 1976 Assembly. At Witherspoon's annual meeting that year the position was taken that judgments about ordination should remain with the presbyteries and a special General Assembly committee should not be established, since the Advisory Council on Church and Society was already studying the matter.⁴⁹

Nonetheless the General Assembly did establish a Task Force to Study Homosexuality; Elder Virginia Davidson, who had been Vice-Moderator of the 1974 General Assembly, was appointed chair. Witherspoon took no official position on the issue since it was under study; but during the two years of the Task Force the issue was addressed in every issue of *Network News*.

On the release of the report in January 1978, the Society presented a summary in *Network News*, urged members to study the report carefully, exhorted presbyteries to develop packets so that sessions could begin studying it, and invited representatives of both the majority and the minority to present their views at the annual meeting held February 24-26, 1978, at the Krisheim Center. Virginia Davidson and Byron Shafer defended the majority report; Richard Lovelace the minority report. (Other issues discussed at the conference were pluralism in the church, Korea, the boycott of the textile company J.P. Stevens, and ways to counter the "limited outlook" of the *Presbyterian Layman*.) The entire April 1978 issue was devoted to "Views on Homosexual Ordination," and this was sent to all commissioners to help them understand a complex and controversial issue.

In the meantime, organizations on the right had already taken preemptive action. Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, the Presbyterian Lay Committee, and the Presbyterian Charismatic Communion publicly supported the

report of the minority of the Task Force, and fifteen pastors and professors signed a declaration dated November 21, 1977, prior to the release of the Task Force report. The fifteen developed the so-called "Chicago Plan," incorporated as a non-profit organization, and hired a public relations firm to organize rank-and-file Presbyterians. Some 400 ministers and elders came to a meeting in Chicago on February 13, 1978, and they urged the passage of resolutions that would demonstrate to commissioners the will of "the true Presbyterian majority." John Fry noted that the publicity raised two fears that would become even more familiar: if the Assembly were to adopt the majority position, there would be widespread defections from the church, and the possibility of reunion with the PCUS would be jeopardized.⁵⁰ After the Chicago meeting, some of its organizers became inactive, but two ministers, the Rev. John H. Stevens of Colorado Springs and the Rev. Harry G. ("Hap") Brahams of La Jolla kept the "Chicago Plan" alive, raising the fear among other conservatives that they might do too much and create a backlash among commissioners to the Assembly.⁵¹

Both the majority and minority reports came before the 1978 Assembly. The Witherspoon Society was the only Chapter 26 organization to speak in behalf of the Task Force's supportive report, and it was allowed only one minute after the Committee had heard from many opponents of the report. The Assembly's subcommittee on the ordination issue was moderated by the Rev. Thomas Gillespie, then of Burlingame, California. The committee sided with the minority report, welcoming gays and lesbians as members, defending their civil rights, but stating that homosexuality is "not God's wish for humanity" and recommending against ordination of openly homosexual persons. It is important to note, however, that Gillespie, when he introduced the section on ordination, urged the Assembly to offer "guidance," not "law," and he advised against any action that "unnecessarily

calls into question the constitutional rights of the presbyteries in the ordination process.”⁵²

The Assembly’s action was considered to be “definitive guidance” under the meaning of the church’s constitution. Later, however, Stated Clerk W.P. Thompson ruled that the Assembly, without intending to do so, had rendered a binding “constitutional interpretation” on the ordination question. This ruling was appealed to the 1979 Assembly, with the argument that a legislative body’s discussion must be taken into consideration when interpreting its actions, but to no avail. (Ironically Thompson later reversed his position, while Gillespie became a more outspoken opponent of gay/lesbian ordination.) The “authoritative interpretation” of 1992 and the amendment to the Book of Order in 1996-97 were not envisaged in the 1978 Assembly’s action, and in fact were excluded by Gillespie’s original statement.

That year Presbyterians for Gay Concerns (as it was now called) once again received hospitality in the Witherspoon booth. At a gathering of PGC, members of the Task Force majority, and their many supporters, they gave Witherspoon the “Den Mother” award for its nurturing role through the years.⁵³ PGC was renamed Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns in 1980, and it has continued to be active at the General Assembly, pressing the ordination question and convincing an increasing number of commissioners that gay and lesbian candidates, despite the church’s prohibitions, have the gifts needed for ordination.

The Lay Committee intensified its campaign, calling in August 1978 for (1) termination of further study of ordination of homosexuals, (2) a change in the Book of Order to permit the ordination of candidates who, in conscience, could not participate in the ordination of women, and (3) dissolution of the connection with the World and National Councils of Churches.⁵⁴ In

1979 the Lay Committee would call for reversal of a provision just adopted by the presbyteries to require the nomination and election of women to church sessions.⁵⁵

Carol Alice and John R. Fry began publishing a series of analyses, mostly in 1978, with the unwieldy but descriptive title *Now Is the Time for the Witherspoon Society to Scrutinize The Layman [sic]*, detailing its misrepresentations and half-truths. This is a publication to which Witherspooners still look back with nostalgia and the hope that it will be done again. Clearly the need has not changed. But fulfilling it would mean paying closer attention to the *Layman*, and making more detailed corrections, than most Witherspooners care to do.

WHAT ABOUT REUNION?

Reunion between the UPCUSA (often called the “Northern” church, but actually nationwide ever since the reunion with the majority of the Cumberland Presbyterians in 1903) and the PCUS (the “Southern” church) had been talked about from time to time. It gained fresh viability after James Andrews, then Stated Clerk of the PCUS, read the 1975 dissertation by Robert H. Bullock, Jr., at Princeton University on the problem of church union in the Presbyterian-Reformed family. The dissertation, Andrews said, made two points that were crucial to the success of reunion: the role of key compromises and the importance of keeping momentum. Andrews in retrospect called Bullock “the intellectual father of Presbyterian reunion.”

In 1977 two seminary presidents, James I. McCord of Princeton Seminary and J. McDowell Richards of Columbia Seminary, convened a meeting at Louisville Seminary. Andrews said that this was the turning point. It was the first time that the conservative wings of the PCUS and the UPCUSA had even met with the reunion committee, and out of this meeting came the key

compromises that eventually made reunion a reality.⁵⁶

John T. Conner, elected Moderator in 1977, confessed that he had been pessimistic about reunion until he attended the PCUS Assembly in Shreveport. Their sending of the “weighted vote” principle to the presbyteries made reunion seem more realistic after 118 years of separation. Conner also said he was surprised to see the PCUS Assembly vote to boycott all Nestlé products (the first time it approved any boycott).⁵⁷

Concern was expressed by women’s organizations, which noted that election of women as elders and deacons in every congregation was not mandated in the PCUS; the plan of union even included a provision exempting congregations for an indefinite period of time. Racial/ethnic advocates called attention to the largely African American makeup of the UPCUSA presbyteries in the Southeast, which would have to be united with the largely white presbyteries of the PCUS. Both groups insisted that there be constitutional provisions guaranteeing full participation and representation.

There was also the provision that twenty-four persons from each of the two existing boards would comprise the new General Assembly Council. This, said Elizabeth Verdesi, “seems to disenfranchise two of every three United Presbyterians, since we are almost three times their size.” The Council would have too much power, she felt, and its members could be reelected for a total of nine years. Her best hope was that the Committee on Representation could ensure an adequate presence of women and minorities.⁵⁸

In January of 1982 Witherspoon’s Steering Committee issued a statement that seemed to accept the inevitability of reunion but asked how it could be strengthened so that it did not obscure

the many important issues of justice. Noting that the document issued in November had important changes in polity and practice from the previous draft of 1978, the statement urged careful study prior to voting. Issues raised included representation, the exemption from ordination of women, uncertainty about ministers and elders who refused to ordain women, the eight-year opportunity for congregations to withdraw with their property, the addition of “essential tenets of the Reformed faith” to the ordination questions, the authoritative if only provisional status given to the PCUS’s 1962 Brief Statement, and the composition of the General Assembly Council.⁵⁹

Robert C. Lamar, Co-Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Presbyterian Union, acknowledged that there were those who thought that they were “giving away the family jewels” and “backing away from hard-won gains in recent years”; but he assured Witherspooners that both concerns had been dealt with in the Articles of Agreement, and he also noted that the many social declarations of the UPCUSA would be carried into the united church.⁶⁰

As reunion seemed increasingly assured, the Steering Committee voted to support it “while continuing to call the church to accountability in its social justice concerns.”⁶¹ They noted that reunion would coincide with Witherspoon’s tenth anniversary, and they wondered not only how they might recruit members in the former PCUS but whether a new organization should be formed with a new name.⁶²

A symposium held at Princeton Seminary October 21-22, 1982, on the fifteenth anniversary of the Confession of 1967, raised further doubts. As a “star-studded cast” of theologians celebrated C-67 and a new inclusive language version, prepared by Cynthia Jarvis and Freda Gardner, was unveiled, the question of the future of C-67 “kept lurking in the background,” all the more

so since reunion was not formally part of the agenda. When John Leith, the representative theologian of the PCUS, emphasized tradition, order, and personal salvation, there were some who wondered whether this was to become the theology of the new PCUSA.⁶³ Edward Dowey, chief author of C-67, raised questions about the Articles of Agreement. While the PCUS would accept the entire Book of Confessions, the interim doctrinal statement would be a 1962 document prepared in the PCUS for instructional, not confessional purposes, while a new Brief Statement of Faith would be drafted by a committee representing diverse groups and points of view — in other words, pressure groups, not governing bodies. The danger, he said, was that C-67 might become a mere historical document.⁶⁴

At the 1982 General Assembly in Hartford, a commissioner once again raised the basic question from the floor: much had been said about unity, but justice and the rights of persons had not been addressed. Robert Hasek, former moderator of the Synod of the Piedmont, announced his intention to vote against reunion if it continued to sacrifice justice in the name of church unity.⁶⁵

The issue for the Executive Committee, then, was whether Witherspoon should set itself against reunion or try to change the shape of reunion. Robb Gwaltney recalled that the issue had been similar at Witherspoon's founding.

I think our impact was significant because we said we wanted to positively affect the new structure rather than saying we were against the whole thing. I wonder if our most effective stance might be to begin to draw up an agenda for the reunited church that can bring it to an active and faithful stance in our society and our world.⁶⁶

David McGown adopted a similarly hopeful stance. Conservatives oppose change, he said; liberals usually seek incremental changes, within

known structures. The task of Witherspoon, he said, is not to oppose change, not even to “manage” change to ensure continuity, but “to help the Body of Christ be at once more whole and more faithful.” He went on, Reunion is going to provide a new openness. Let Witherspoon utilize all its creative energies to set new styles and directions during the transition time to more fluidity — before the structure are all solidified.

The question, then, was where justice and peace could be “built into the foundations and not just be ‘add on’s.” He mentioned racial/ethnic concerns, new opportunities for women, a global perspective, and helping the church “move to a confession of ‘87 built around liberation even as ‘67 was built around reconciliation.”⁶⁷

Bruce Tischler reported on a “rocking chair” conference in Louisville in October 1982, at which thirty from each denomination had an open-ended discussion with no advance agenda. He said that the PCUS people “all knew each other and had their act together,” and he concluded that the differences of style were “not just a matter of getting used to each other. With equal representation on the organizing Council, and PCUS having its act together, UPCUSA will be left out in cold.” Gwaltney did a detailed analysis, pointing out that the smaller and more regional PCUS operated like an extended family, with a network of individual relationships, while the larger and more national UPCUSA operated in a more “rational” way, following rules and procedures in order to carry out clearly defined tasks; in reunion, he predicted, “we will each value our system more and the other less.”⁶⁸

Aubrey Brown, the now retired editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook*, might have agreed. The *Outlook* had been a courageous voice in the South since 1943, when it was purchased and revitalized by Brown. Because it championed racial justice,

leadership roles for women and minorities, ecumenical cooperation, and reunion, many in the North subscribed to it, both to demonstrate support for the *Outlook* and to get its distinctive approach to news of the church in both North and South. Brown, looking back in 1995, said, *The Outlook* has something of the watchman idea in it, and it was needed. The church's bureaucracy was committed to keeping the lid on things, the curtains drawn. It would tell the [membership] what it wanted [the members] to know. Boards and committees were closed to the church press and you might be given selected information or none at all.⁶⁹

At the reuniting Assembly in Atlanta, some Witherspooners expressed gratitude over the willingness to deal forthrightly with social justice issues. They were alarmed, however, at a motion on the last morning, approved by the Assembly, to elect four "recognized conservative evangelicals" as advisory members of the General Assembly Council. Witherspoon felt that this betrayed the process to which each church had subscribed and suggested that "recognized liberation theologians" also be added to the GAC.⁷⁰ Robb Gwaltney reported that Matt Welde of Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns had come over to assure him that this was "no sort of power play." When Gwaltney pointed out that they had insisted on changing the rules of representation, Welde replied that their only purpose had been to overcome past discrimination against conservatives. When Gwaltney said that it was incumbent on them to lead the move to have other positions represented, Welde indicated that they "couldn't do that."⁷¹

In the spirit of reunion, the Executive Committee brought recommendations to the annual meeting that the period 1983-85 be a time to focus on reunion, reflecting on the possibility of a new statement of purpose as the Society entered its second decade; that the by-laws be suspended during this period, while the Executive

Committee would be held responsible to see that all necessary functions were covered; that two persons from the former PCUS be included on the Executive Committee; and that proposals for the future shape of the organization be presented no later than the annual meeting in 1985. These were approved at the annual meeting.⁷²

WITHERSPOON'S "SOUTHERN STRATEGY"

Witherspoon already had members "in place" in the South, since the UPCUSA had become a national denomination after the reunion with the majority of the Cumberland Presbyterians in 1903. Its Board of National Missions worked in Appalachia and among African Americans throughout the South. It sponsored preparatory schools for African Americans, colleges (both white and black, segregated against their wishes because of state law), and two seminaries, Lincoln and Johnson C. Smith. Much of the story has been told by Andrew Murray, professor at Lincoln Theological Seminary. He and his wife Dorothea served as volunteer Executive Secretaries of the Witherspoon Society from 1983 to 1989.⁷³

Harold M. Brockus, a minister in Pinellas Park, Florida, in the Tampa-Saint Petersburg area, was one of the early members of the Witherspoon Society and a member of the Steering Committee for several terms after 1976, and again for three terms in the 1990s. He and others have maintained a viable Witherspoon presence in the Presbytery of Tampa Bay.

A number of new members were also added from the PCUS. The most visible was Ernest Trice Thompson, Jr., who was given the title "Southern Liaison" and formed a Witherspoon group in Congaree Presbytery as early as October of 1983. A news report sent to the *Presbyterian Outlook* pointed out that this had also been the locale of the only organized Presbyterian chapter of

“Friends of Reunion.”⁷⁴ It was suggested that local chapters be formed in Atlanta and in Richmond, where a St. James Fellowship already existed.⁷⁵

Thompson planned a conference on the role of advocacy groups in the life of the church, to be held May 13-15, 1984, in Montreat, the PCUS conference center.⁷⁶ As it turned out, plans for the conference, with a hoped-for attendance of 100, had to be downsized. A conference on “The Unity and Diversity of the PCUSA” did take place on May 14, 1984, at the Hillside Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia, with George Laird Hunt, editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook*, and Andrew Young, Mayor of Atlanta, as featured speakers.

Thompson resigned in 1985 because of obligations to his congregation, presbytery, and synod, coming on top of the death of his father; but he assured the Executive Committee that the South Carolina chapter would continue with “eager and committed” officers.⁷⁷ In reply, Andrew Murray recalled the first meeting of the Witherspoon leadership with Thompson and his father during the Assembly in Atlanta.

At that time we weren't sure what reunion would mean for Witherspoon, and we weren't sure how we would be received in PCUS territory, but your willingness to identify with us was a great encouragement, and brought us a new understanding of the prophetic tradition in the PCUS.⁷⁸

There were others in the South who stepped forward, too. In 1986 George B. Telford, Jr., of Blacksburg, Virginia, was elected Secretary/Communicator.⁷⁹ Soon he was to become Director of the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit at national level. The Rev. William S. McLean, pastor of the Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, attended the Executive

Committee meeting and expressed his willingness to serve as Associate Treasurer⁸⁰; but the relationship did not continue beyond the year. George L. Hunt, editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook*, not only made favorable comments about the *Network News* in 1980 and 1983⁸¹ but wrote an article about the Witherspoon Society in the *Outlook* for March 5, 1984, calling it one of the “big four” Chapter 9 organizations.

There were also some negative reactions to Witherspoon, even among those who had been identified as potential members in the South. Wellford Hobbie, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, wrote to Thompson that he and Cameron Murchison had attended a Witherspoon meeting during the General Assembly in Atlanta. He found himself “more than a little uneasy about some of the rhetoric expressed during that meeting and some of the positions that they took in relation to critical issues.” His estimate was that it “was very sensitive to social issues but had been greatly influenced by many other advocacy groups and was giving its support in a rather uncritical way to any minority group.”⁸²

THE TRAVAILS OF REUNION

The merger process was a delicate one in many presbyteries, since the difference in traditional styles easily led to mutual “culture shock.” In dealing with many issues, what one tradition took for granted was regarded as an abomination by the other. In addition, the Eighties saw intense divisions over foreign policy, especially over nuclear weapons and the “contra war” in Nicaragua. Witherspooners were part of the 156-member delegation to Nicaragua in the summer of 1983 during which Witness for Peace was organized⁸³; they were involved in the Pledge of Resistance to U.S. military action in Central America; they also praised and participated in the Sanctuary movement, in the course of which

John Fife was arrested in 1985 and was convicted of a federal crime in 1986.⁸⁴ The Washington Office of the PCUSA initiated a Presbyterian Advocates program in support of General Assembly policy recommendations on Central America.⁸⁵

In 1985 the Advisory Committee on Church and Society launched a study with the theme “Presbyterians and Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance?” Among the possibilities discussed was nonviolent resistance, including the withholding of a portion of one’s personal income tax. This study provoked a full-length response from Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom, a conservative organization linked with the Institute for Religion and Democracy, and its position was further publicized by the Lay Committee.⁸⁶ A number of Southern ministers and elders, often responding to requests from people they knew, supported the attack led by PDRF and the Lay Committee. From their perspective it seemed quite credible for them to conclude as one elder did, a federal judge who was considered a liberal by Tennessee standards, that “the Presbyterian Church is out of control!”⁸⁷ He was also vocal in criticizing Belle Miller McMaster, Director of the Ministry Unit on Social Justice and Peacemaking, for the Washington Office’s letter to President Bush in opposition to the Panama Invasion.⁸⁸

There were also internal church issues. The debate over ordination of gays and lesbians became an ongoing source of tension. Although the PCUS had taken a position essentially the same as that of the UPCUSA in 1979, insistence on ordaining gays and lesbians has continued, and resistance has been stronger in the South. When the evaluation of Stated Clerk James Andrews came up in 1987, Witherspoon was openly critical of him because of the changes in procedure that had been imposed on his watch, hampering Witherspoon’s accustomed activities

at the General Assembly. Andrews had ended the “self-select” method of assigning commissioners to Assembly committees, replacing it with random assignment by computer. He also ended direct access by special organizations to commissioners, prohibiting the distribution of memoranda.⁸⁹ He followed the Southern tradition of not dividing Assembly committees into subcommittees, with the result that committee deliberation often became cumbersome, controlled by moderators and by vocal white males. Critics also accused him of encouraging the staff to take a passive role during committee deliberations, making committees more dependent on the staff of his own Office of the General Assembly.

Chagrin at the “closed style” of the General Assembly in Indianapolis in 1985 was shared by a number of Chapter 9 groups, and a joint communication with the conservative Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns was contemplated.⁹⁰ A two-page information sheet prepared in 1985 began,

The Witherspoon Society was founded in 1973 by Presbyterians concerned that the United Presbyterian Church not lose sight of its prophetic role and social justice commitments as it worked its way through a major structural reorganization. In the mid-1980s we experience a gentle sense of *deja vu* as we observe an even more fundamental reorganization as reunion with the Presbyterian Church U.S. produces a new Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Our concerns remain the same: that Presbyterians and their Church continue to hear and heed God’s call to empower the powerless; to speak of God’s justice and mercy to a world in need of repentance; to raise to the consciousness of the Church the concerns of the poor and the disenfranchised; to call the Church to reformation when it falls short of God’s demand for right relations in its own life.⁹¹

Current areas of concern that were listed (with a

number of particulars under each) were Peacemaking, Brief Statement of Faith, An Inclusive Church and Society, Social and Economic Justice, Lifestyle, and Ecumenical and International Relationships.

Doubts about reunion continued. Dorothea Murray reported the opinion of Bruce Rigdon that our Church is backing away from its commitment to minorities, women, ecumenical involvement, world relationships. He sees the South taking over the power in the Church, and that it will be years before we can recover our momentum in these areas.

This was also the time of the proposed move of the denominational headquarters to a new location — the combined result of several factors: the need, after reunion, to have offices in a neutral location not linked with either church; negative attitudes toward cosmopolitan New York and the denominational bureaucracies in the “God Box”; and a populist enthusiasm about being located somewhere in the “heartland.” Kansas City was the site chosen by the committee, but the next General Assembly chose Louisville instead. Murray saw this as a symbol of the direction being taken by the church, with an official cost of \$32 million and an unofficial estimate of \$40 million.⁹²

What was the impact of reunion on the dynamics of the church as a whole? It clearly strengthened the conservative vote at General Assembly and in the presbyteries, adding to an already significant percentage of ministers and elders who were evangelical in theology and conservative in social positions. These consequences have been regarded in hindsight as vindicating the position taken by opponents of reunion. There have been others, however, who see reunion as an inevitable step in the development of a nationwide church in which the divisions are increasingly not regional but

cultural, often rural versus urban.

PLANNING A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN

At the time of reunion the membership of the Society was about 850, concentrated in a dozen metropolitan areas in the North. Funding was sought to train a group of volunteers who would work in rural areas and in the South, meeting twice a year in a grassroots setting.⁹³ There was hope that like-minded persons in the PCUS would strengthen Witherspoon’s ranks. In 1985, however, a student concluded from research and interviewing that membership had increased by only about 100 in the PCUS area.⁹⁴

Foundation grants were not forthcoming, but in 1984 a couple who were long-time Witherspooners⁹⁵ offered a challenge grant of up to \$5,000 if matching contributions could be raised. The specific purposes were to distribute *Network News* on a trial basis in targeted regions where Witherspoon needed to expand its membership; to recruit new members in the South and in rural areas; to increase membership in all areas of the country in order to have more effective influence on issues of concern; to mobilize nationwide “networks” on the basis of interests indicated on renewal forms; and to make the Executive Committee more representative geographically, racially, and ethnically. Pledges had surpassed \$5,000 one week before the deadline of January 5, 1985, and another challenge of up to \$1,500 was made, with a deadline of January 31; money was to be used for two additional projects, to subsidize regional meetings and to support gatherings of representatives from kindred organizations.⁹⁶

The total response came to more than \$14,000, and this was placed in a special account. In the meantime over 400 members failed to pay their dues for 1985, perhaps thinking that the challenge gift included membership dues, and thus another letter had to be sent out.⁹⁷ At the suggestion of

Bill Levering, the Executive Committee created interest-group networks, each of which would have space in the *Network News* and would have up to \$100 for expenses. Those mentioned included the new confessional statement, Central America, PLGC, and peace issues in liaison with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.⁹⁸

Hopes for a large enough budget were never fulfilled. In 1989, job descriptions for four positions were adopted, with the possibility that these could be either volunteer or paid (in all cases on a part-time and often a token basis): Secretary/Communicator, Administrative Assistant, General Assembly Coordinator, and Editor of *Network News*. The by-laws were also revised to encourage synod and presbytery groups and mandate that each officer maintain close relationships with them. This requirement was softened a few years later, when it became clear that organization on the hoped-for scale would not happen.

THE “BRIEF STATEMENT”

In 1986 Jean Triplett suggested that it was time for a National Meeting in 1987 or 1988, inviting speakers “on the cutting edge of theology” and looking at the role of Witherspoon and its relationship with the General Assembly.⁹⁹ As planning went forward, thinking focused on the Brief Statement of Faith, which was to be the symbol of reunion.

The 1988 National Gathering was held at the Bergamo Center, Dayton, Ohio. Robert McAfee Brown gave the keynote address on the Brief Statement. Jack Stotts, Chair of the Special Committee to prepare the statement, was present, as was Jane Dempsey Douglass, Vice-Chair. Edward Dowey, drafter of the Confession of 1967, challenged some and confirmed other features of the draft.

Especially forceful responses came from

Elizabeth Johnson, a professor of New Testament at New Brunswick, and Byron Shafer, a professor of Hebrew Bible at Fordham who had earlier been on the Task Force on Homosexuality in 1978 and was active in Witherspoon and other progressive organizations. Both were specific in highlighting problems and offering alternatives, often giving biblical citations.¹⁰⁰ Later the Executive Committee drew up a number of suggested revisions and sent them to the 1988 General Assembly’s committee on the Brief Statement.¹⁰¹ One suggestion that was clearly adopted was mention of “the God of Abraham and Sarah.” The more explicit language about “nursing infant” (cf. Isa. 49:14-15) is based on a point made by Byron Shafer. Others suggestions, too, seem to be reflected in changes of wording made between the draft and the version that was approved by the General Assembly and the presbyteries, taking effect in 1991.

A cloud still only the size of a man’s hand during the Bergamo gathering was the report of the task force on Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age, around which the most furious storms were to swirl at the 1988 Assembly. Several members of this task force were present; Anne Llewelyn Barstow made an especially eloquent presentation.

There was much more at the 1988 Gathering, and it is impossible to list all the themes and presenters. Jane Parker Huber reported on the new Presbyterian Hymnal, still in preparation. Worship was led by Jana Childers. And Maurice McCrackin, at an age of more than eighty, was invited to attend the Witherspoon Gathering in 1988 at the Bergamo Center (he had already been a featured speaker at an annual meeting in Cincinnati in 1977).

McCrackin was an early advocate of racial justice and of peace. He became a “tax resister” in 1948 by withholding from his income taxes the portion that went to the military budget. He was removed

from the ministry by the Presbytery of Cincinnati on the grounds that he had “resisted the ordinances of God” (Rom. 13:2) on pretense of Christian liberty — an action confirmed by the Permanent Judicial Commission of the UPCUSA in 1962. The process was orchestrated by Stated Clerk Eugene Carson Blake, who a few years later was arrested while desegregating a Baltimore amusement park. Civil disobedience was not yet fashionable, and McCrackin had been ahead of his time.¹⁰²

In 1985, Charles P. Forbes of the Baltimore Presbytery began a campaign in behalf of McCrackin. Forbes said, “This action is for the Presbyterian Church, not Maurice McCrackin. We are the body that has erred; we are the ones who carry continued responsibility for saying that such a man as Maurice McCrackin cannot be our pastor. Is that a legacy of our church we want to leave to the next generation?”¹⁰³ Overtures were sent from Baltimore Presbytery in 1985 and years following, asking that the General Assembly confess its error, declare McCrackin a fully ordained minister, honor him for his “steadfast adherence to the demands of his Christian conscience,” commend him to the church at large as “an example of a depth of Christian commitment rarely seen,” and ask the forgiveness of God and McCrackin. The 1987 Assembly took action, and McCrackin briefly addressed the Assembly.¹⁰⁴

DEREGULATION

Especially revealing in the wake of reunion was the initiative to delete Chapter 9 (the old Chapter 28) from the Book of Order in 1990. The provision recognizing “special organizations” had been in the Form of Government of the “northern stream” since 1902, in order to acknowledge the distinctive forms of “worship, service, or nurture” offered by women’s missionary societies, Christian Endeavor, and other parachurch organizations, and at the same

time to require a certain degree of accountability to governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, synods, or the General Assembly). In the PCUS, however, there had been nothing like Chapter 9; many mission and service organizations were under the decentralized control of presbyteries and synods; and the “family” ethos of the PCUS probably decreased internal tensions. The difference of ecclesiastical cultures set the background for the controversy.

The “presenting occasion” for the move to delete this provision was the publicity given in the *Layman* to Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, who had distributed rather explicit materials at the Youth Triennium on how to avoid AIDS. Hostility toward PLGC was balanced by hostility toward the *Layman* on the part of many in the church; in the time-honored style of the “belligerent moderate,” the reaction was to blame “extremists” at both ends of the spectrum for any troubles in the church.

There was much more than this in the way of “background,” however. A committee of the 1989 General Assembly, in reviewing the reports of Chapter 9 organizations, discovered a number of problems, and on its recommendation the General Assembly directed the GAC to ask for more complete information on financial contributions to these organizations. The Assembly also expressed concern that some Chapter 9 organizations “have no real membership from the church at large,” being self-perpetuating boards with no voting rights for contributors.¹⁰⁵ The Presbyterian Lay Committee and its defenders, for their part, felt that continued scrutiny of the Lay Committee and the *Layman* had no legitimate basis and should be terminated. Finally, the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, which had never been happy with its assigned task of keeping track of Chapter 9 organizations, exhibited a pattern of passive resistance; it devoted minimal energy to contacts with these organizations and made several

recommendations to the 1990 Assembly that seemed definitely unfriendly to them.¹⁰⁶

At the hearings before the General Assembly committee, the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit conveyed its dislike of the task it had been given. Stated Clerk James Andrews was audibly critical of Chapter 9 during the hearings before the General Assembly committee, and he expressed the opinion that “benign neglect is the best way to deal with special-concern groups. If we leave the extremists alone they will die for lack of support.”¹⁰⁷

The deletion of Chapter 9 by action of the General Assembly and the presbyteries did not turn out to be the disaster some had feared. The Stated Clerk permitted voluntary organizations to continue renting space in the exhibition hall at each General Assembly, perhaps because they make the Assembly much more interesting and bring numerous visitors who help fund the costs of the Assembly. An attempt to craft a more moderate version of Chapter 9 failed in 1998. But commissioner resolutions, quickly approved by the Assembly, have strengthened the provisions for voluntary reporting of activities and contributions, now to the office of the Stated Clerk rather than to Theology and Worship.

THE CONSERVATIVE ASSAULT

The *Presbyterian Layman* had always been adept at finding “hot-button issues” and publicizing them to the members of the church, some of whom were inclined to believe all that they read, while others, even if they disagreed with the *Layman*’s “tone,” assumed that where there was smoke there must be some fire. After the revocation of Chapter 9, there were few constraints upon the activities of the Lay Committee, and most commissioners to the General Assembly have stoically accepted the barrage of half-truths coming from that quarter. The *Layman* has exploited to the full a Supreme

Court decision, *New York Times v. Sullivan*, which said that any “public figure” in a libel suit must prove “actual malice,” an almost impossible test.

In 1988 it was the CONA (Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age) report; in 1990, PLGC’s distribution of literature at the Youth Triennium on how to avoid AIDS. In 1991 it was the Sexuality Report, with busloads of conservatives coming for an all-day public hearing. In 1993 it was the RE-Imagining controversy, which began as a venture in spirituality and was transmuted by the *Layman* into a heretical “worship of the goddess Sophia.” Mary Ann Lundy of the Women’s Division was made the target and eventually was fired.¹⁰⁸

In 1996 it was the end of a three-year moratorium on the “ordination question” and the adoption of Amendment B, the addition to the Book of Order (G-6.0106b) that required “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.” In 1998 it was controversy over the National Network of Presbyterian College Women (NNPCW), who had to defend themselves at this and the next year’s Assemblies. In 1999 it was the announcement that the Rev. Jane Spahr, an open lesbian, would receive the Women of Faith Award. The other awardees, Jane Dempsey Douglas and Letty Russell, stated that they would not receive it if Spahr did not. After off-again, on-again actions by the National Ministries Division and the General Assembly Council, the awards went ahead, but greater control in the future was imposed.

In the summer of 2000 it was an address by Dirk Ficca at the Peacemaking Conference, during which he asked the provocative question, “What’s the big deal about Jesus?” and the *Layman*, without pausing for the answer, made the question into a declaration of heresy. In 2001 there was the Confessing Church Movement,

which lifted three new “fundamentals” into standards of orthodoxy and demanded that all officers subscribe to them or stand self-condemned.

STANDING UP TO THE RIGHT

In the summer of 1999 a meeting was held in Manhattan with leaders of the Institute for Democracy Studies, a think-tank whose directors include as many Republicans as Democrats. The IDS had already traced violence against Planned Parenthood clinics in 1991 and examined the ideology of Promise Keepers. Now it directed its attention to the right-wing attack on the National and World Councils of Churches, the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the growing campaign to take over the Presbyterians and the Methodists. Alfred E. Ross, director of IDS, proposed a book on the Presbyterian Right but indicated the need for funds to do research and printing.

The book would examine the history of the self-proclaimed “renewal groups” in the PC(USA), their tactics, and their goals for the denomination. Their strategy, Ross asserted, was not to leave the church but to take it over, since the mainline denominations, despite the conservatives’ constant gloating that “the mainline is being sidelined,” are an important basis of legitimation in our society. Conservatives, fresh from their victory with Amendment B, seemed to have been caught napping at the 1997 Assembly in Syracuse. They corrected this oversight the next year, bringing in Clarke Reed, a seasoned political operative, and setting up a “war room” for monitoring all developments and guiding commissioners on committee procedures, motions, and “talking points.”

Progressive Presbyterians, who had been frustrated by the power of the Presbyterian Right and had often borne the brunt of its attacks, felt

that the IDS project was definitely worth doing. They wondered, however, whether the money could be raised, since there were many other competing causes, especially removal of Amendment B. In addition, there were many who had ambivalent reactions to the style of earlier IDS publications. They were glad to see an organization willing to “play hardball” as effectively as the Presbyterian Right. At the same time they anticipated questions whether the presentation would “demonize the right,” promote “guilt by association,” or press a “conspiracy theory.” There were some who feared that publication of such a study would push the “vacillating middle” into the arms of the Right.

Al Ross of IDS was aware of these criticisms, and his response was that the report simply quoted facts, usually in the Right’s own words. If Presbyterians want to engage in dialogue, he added, it should be *informed* dialogue. His purpose was to show that the Right’s campaign began in the Thirties and Forties with a type of economic and political conservatism that was hostile to the New Deal, the civil rights movement, and most other advances in legislation for the common good.

Witherspoon’s Executive Committee proceeded cautiously. After legal consultation, it agreed to accept contributions for the project, with the typical legal understanding that neither Witherspoon nor IDS was an agent of the other. The Executive Committee set up a task force for liaison, agreed to distribute information, and allocated up to \$5,000 for this purpose. To publish the book the Presbyterian Information Project was established as a project of the Scarborough Presbyterian Church in the Hudson River Presbytery, with leadership from its pastor, Christian Iosso.

The spring of 2000 saw the publication of *A Moment to Decide: The Crisis in Mainstream*

Presbyterianism.¹⁰⁹ An analysis was published by G. Daniel Little, a Presbyterian who had held important pastorates as well as administrative positions in the UPCUSA.¹¹⁰ The book was distributed by Presbyterian Pipeline, a service of the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, at a price of \$18. Witherspoon purchased 1000 copies of the book and made it available at the discounted price of \$10 for members.

The book sold well and was widely read. Often it became the focus of discussion groups in congregations and presbyteries. There were the predictable cries of “McCarthyism on the left” or “tactics just like those of the *Layman*.” But responses in general were far more favorable than anticipated. According to anecdotal information from various parts of the country, many Presbyterians who had not paid much attention to the culture wars raging in the PC(USA) were not only persuaded but alarmed. At least one sentiment widely expressed was relief that someone was “finally standing up to the bullies.”

CURRENT TRENDS

In moving toward a conclusion, it is worth asking, as the Witherspoon Society gathers to celebrate its 35th anniversary in 2003, where it now stands and where it seems to be going.

1. Cooperative Action. During the 1990s the Presbyterian Right consisted of a number of organizations united in the well-funded Presbyterian Coalition and Presbyterian Forum. On the left, Witherspoon and other progressive groups have continued to work together, with plenty of differences over details. The Witherspoon Society, following its time-honored tradition as “the left’s center,” has tried to hold together the whole range of issues, some of which have special advocates in organizations like the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, the newer Presbyterians for Restoring Creation, Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options,

and Voices of Sophia, a feminist organization with an assertive style.

There were also the groups concerned with the “ordination question.” PLGC and the More Light Churches Network united in 1998 to become More Light Presbyterians. Along with them were That All May Freely Serve, led by lesbian evangelist Jane Spahr, and Shower of Stoles, which collected the stoles of ministers, ordained or intended, who had been blocked by prohibitions in a number of denominations. These organizations have come to be known as the “Three Sisters”; they describe themselves as “partnering for justice in a more inclusive church.”

And then there was the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, founded in 1997 by former moderators Robert Bohl and John Buchanan, with the support of fifteen other former moderators, to work for the removal of Amendment B and its restrictions on the discretion of governing bodies in examining and ordaining elders and ministers. While the conservative press grouped it among the liberals, it has always maintained an independent course. Its chief value is in enlisting “tall steeple” ministers, persons of both eloquence and influence who can appeal to moderates and from whose number several successful moderatorial candidates have come.

2. Semper Reformanda. Witherspoon was joined in its attempt to cover all progressive issues by another organization. In 1993, at the initiative of former moderator Robert Davidson and long-time activist Robert Stone, a group met at Chautauqua and engaged in extensive discussion of ways to revitalize the Presbyterian Church. In 1994 they met again and approached David McGown, incoming president of the Witherspoon Society. Representatives from a number of progressive Presbyterian groups met together and agreed on the formation of Semper

Reformanda (Always Being Reformed) with two main purposes: encouraging coordinated activities among the various progressive groups, and engaging in theological reflection on the full range of issues facing the church and society. Within a short time McGown resigned as president of Witherspoon to devote his attention to the new grouping, and Jeff Doane, vice-president, took his place.

Semper Reformanda was organized during the 1995 General Assembly in Cincinnati and invited all peace and justice organizations to elect representatives to its board.¹¹¹ Stone described its task as a combination of *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*.¹¹² In 1996 it held the first of its pre-Assembly conferences, devoting a full day to worship, a keynote address, briefings on upcoming Assembly business, and small-group discussion. Douglas Ottati, professor of theology at Union Seminary in Richmond, quickly emerged as the in-house theologian of the organization. Semper's style was always vigorous, looking at strategic issues in the church and approaching them in an explicitly progressive way. Insofar as there were internal tensions, some on the leadership team emphasized the more "activist" function of coordinating the progressive organizations by offering strong leadership, while in actuality its main function was the "theological" one at General Assembly, which in the eyes of some made it too much a "discussion/debating society."¹¹³

In 2000 the leadership team of Semper Reformanda proposed a merger with the Witherspoon Society. After repeated and thorough discussion, a memorandum of agreement was worked out, approved by the boards of both organizations, and voted on at their annual meetings during the 2001 General Assembly. Semper's Pre-Assembly Conference and its two memorials to Robert J. Stone, a lectureship during the General Assembly and funding for an internship at the Washington

Office, were to be maintained, and up to four leaders of Semper were to be elected to the Executive Committee.

3. *Ghost Ranch Conferences.* Cooperation among progressive organizations began to take another form as well. In 1999, acting on suggestions that came out of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary Gathering in 1998, Witherspoon planned a summer conference at Ghost Ranch on the theme "Organizing for Christian Economic Action." This turned out to be so successful that another conference was held in 2000. In 2001 a similar conference was co-sponsored with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation, and this now appears to be a successful and lasting combination.

4. *Oxbow/Protestant Justice Action.* Cooperation also moved outside the PC(USA) and became more ecumenical. In 1998 the non-official "justice organizations" associated with the mainline Protestant churches began talking together about common action. The organizations that formally took part were the Methodist Federation for Social Action, the oldest of these groups; Christians for Justice Action (UCC); Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ); Lutheran Human Relations Association (ELCA); Baptist Peace Fellowship (American Baptists, Alliance of Baptists, and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship); and Witherspoon. Several African-American leaders in these denominations were involved, and efforts were made to establish direct contact with the African American denominations, which by their very character are "justice organizations." The chief initiating figure was the Rev. Harvey Lord, retired Disciples minister in Hyde Park, who suggested the name "Oxbow." This applies to a bend in a river, caused by strong currents and in turn channeling currents in new directions. Since these connotations are far from self-evident, the group eventually decided to call itself, for public purposes at least, Protestant Justice Action. It

planned its first national conference, with the theme “JusticeWorks: Renewing the Church’s Social Witness,” in St. Louis, March 28-30, 2003.

5. Web Site. At the fall meeting of the Executive Committee in 1999 it was agreed that Witherspoon should move seriously into the electronic age and set up a web site. Doug King, whose work as editor of *Network News* for seven years was much appreciated, was voted the funds to take training in setting up a web site as well as a small retainer for continuing as Webweaver. The site went online early in 2000, at <www.witherspoonsociety.org>. The conservative Presbyweb, which has claimed comprehensiveness in news coverage, often clicked to it, just as Witherspoon has also clicked to Presbyweb, and it is used by many people across the church.

Going online has turned out to have a number of advantages. It enables more people to contribute articles, short or long (many people seem to find it easier to hammer out an e-mail message than to mail an article in hard copy). It stimulates responses and discussions, which at times can move toward an agreed resolution. And it has had an interesting influence on *Network News*. Editor Doug King, while he often calls for specific contributions to the periodical, is also able to select articles that have

already been posted on the web page, making them available to members and friends who are not yet on the web and enshrining them for perpetuity in *Network News* as Witherspoon’s “journal of record.”

6. The “Whole Gospel Congregations” Project. While Witherspoon has been most effective (or at least has had the most continuity of effort) at the national level, it has always taken an interest in the activities of congregations and presbyteries. There have always been a few presbytery chapters, while in some of the more liberal presbyteries a chapter has seemed not even to be needed. At several times a “congregation project” has been outlined by the Executive Committee, and profiles of congregations have often been printed in *Network News*. In 1992 the Society began offering its Congregation Award.

In 2000, responding to the false dichotomy of “evangelism versus social advocacy,” the Executive Committee gave priority to describing

**Recipients of the Congregation Award
(since 2001 the Whole Gospel Congregation Award)**

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1992 | Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY |
| 1993 | Riviera Presbyterian Church, Miami, FL |
| 1994 | The Village Church, Prairie Village, KS |
| 1995 | Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati, OH |
| 1996 | More Light Churches Network |
| 1997 | South Presbyterian Church, Syracuse, NY |
| 1998 | Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC |
| 1999 | Gethsemane Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth, TX |
| 2000 | Office of the Americas, Los Angeles, CA |
| 2001 | Central Presbyterian Church, Louisville, KY |
| 2002 | Bethany and Broad Street Presbyterian Churches, Columbus, OH |
| 2003 | Igreja Presbiteriana Unida do Brasil (IPU) |
| 2004 | All Souls Presbyterian Church, Richmond, VA |
| 2006 | First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, AL |
| 2008 | First Presbyterian Church, Palo Alto, CA |
| 2010 | Kwanzaa Community Church Presbyterian, Minneapolis., MN |

and promoting “Whole Gospel Congregations,” and the name of the annual Congregation Award was soon changed to reflect this emphasis. The Society’s tradition is to promote not just a social gospel, not just an individual and private gospel, but a gospel that takes all dimensions of human life seriously. The purpose of this project is to encourage a broadly representative discussion of what the whole gospel means, trying to learn from the many congregations that are proclaiming the whole gospel in their own settings. The kickoff came at a conference at Stony Point in early February, 2002, with the theme “The Hope of Reconciliation Today: The Confession of 1967 at 35, Mission in the World and Wholeness in the Church.” By considering C-67, it was hoped, the Witherspoon Society will be in a better position to reclaim the full confessional heritage of our church, understand the “full gospel,” and discern what makes for wholeness in both church and society.

THEMES AND ISSUES

In reviewing the story of the Witherspoon Society, several themes are recurrent.

1. The Society was called forth by “restructure” in the wake of the Sixties, and on its tenth anniversary in 1983 it faced new challenges after “reunion.” In both cases a mood of drawing back and shifting priorities swept through the church. Changes in budgets have led in turn to changes in organizational structure of General Assembly agencies. This was seen in restructure, in the reorganization following reunion, in the emergency “Shape and Form” conference at Halloween time in 1993, and in several administrative directives initiated by John Detterick, Executive Director of the General Assembly Council.

2. In these and other cases the impulse toward drawing back and downsizing was not purely spontaneous. There had been open agitation by

the *Presbyterian Layman*, often in the form of personal attacks upon office holders who then lost their positions. Many church sessions reduced their contributions to the general mission budget and to the per capita assessments paid by presbyteries. The role of the Lay Committee and other conservative groups has been increasingly visible at the General Assembly, where these groups constitute what observers often call a “shadow church.” There is a parallel increase in “parachurch” activities, with separate youth conferences, church trainings, and placement networks. The ethos appears to be one of refusal to cooperate with the official governing bodies of the church except when these bodies agree with their programs. To many observers it looks like a program for takeover and, in the meantime, of intimidation and boycott.

3. The result has been not only a downsizing of staff and a redrawing of organization charts. Two other results are also noteworthy. First, there is constant pressure to set priorities, put programs in competition with each other, and favor the ones that receive the highest rankings. Inevitably terms like “mission” and “evangelism” drift to the top, while the much more numerous terms like “peace,” “justice,” “environment,” and “Washington Office” receive more scattered votes. Second, the organizational chart becomes steadily more unified and consolidated. Old-timers remember the three classic boards of Foreign Missions, National Missions, and Christian Education. These were carried over into the new terminology of Global Ministries, National Ministries, and Congregational Ministries. But at the Halloween Conference of 1993 the committees governing these units were consolidated into a “unicameral” General Assembly Council, which was to make all final decisions. What is lost is an open-textured church in which a variety of activities can go on, nourished by mutual trust and without crippling supervision, control, and censorship. When there is constant fear of being singled out and accused

of dereliction of duty, administrators will be inclined to be cautious and seek to exert maximum control.

4. Witherspoon has seen its calling to be, from the very beginning, not to resist change, not even to “manage” change, but to seek greater justice and greater representativeness in the life of the church. The tone of the internal debates at the time of reunion reflects a consensus that justice should not be compromised for the sake of unity. Some were hopeful that this would not happen. Others feared it and counseled against reunion. In view of the increased exclusion of gay and lesbian persons, the loss of accountability on the part of “special organizations,” the ongoing barrage of attacks against individuals, and the tightening of controls in the entire organizational structure, it is difficult to argue that reunion was a “success” on Witherspoon’s terms.

5. Witherspoon has always wanted its policies to be based on theological reflection, sometimes expressed in large-scale principles, sometimes the outcome of close analysis of the current situation. The former approach has the dangers of not only being grandiose but stimulating endless theoretical debate without coming to any vigorous plan of action; the latter has the dangers of narrowing the field of vision and thinking too pragmatically, in terms of this particular issue or the next success that might be scored. The life of Witherspoon has never been without this tension or without full awareness of this tension. One of the Society’s virtues, however, is that its office-holders are strong-minded, outspoken individuals who are not inclined to let issues slip past them.

6. Another persistent tension has been between activity at the General Assembly level, always a “must” and usually carried out in an effective way, and activity in the presbyteries and synods, where successes are harder to find. Witherspoon has tried various structural approaches. At the

beginning its Steering Committee was to have elected representatives from the twelve geographical synods; later the by-laws encouraged synod and presbytery groups and mandated that each officer maintain close relations with them. The requirement was softened a few years later, when it became clear that organization on the hoped-for scale would not happen. Major energy in recent years has been directed toward congregations and now takes the form of the “Whole Gospel Congregation Project.” This is understood in relation to the confessional heritage of the church, especially the Confession of 1967, whose thirty-fifth anniversary has just been celebrated, and it is hoped that useful insights can be gained from congregations around the country. When Witherspoon’s energies are focused upon the General Assembly and its actions, it inevitably looks like part of the “establishment” to many younger people, those engaged in serious struggles in their own localities, or those who feel that “identity issues” linked with race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation are central to their own lives.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee, held October 3-5, 2002, in Albuquerque, the group went through a free-flowing process of reflection on the purposes of the Witherspoon Society and drafted the following Statement of Purpose:

Listening and learning from others,
engaging the church and [or in] the world
God loves,
we witness, through demonstration and
proclamation,
to the whole gospel of God’s radical love.

It was recognized that this is still tentative, needing wider discussion and approval, but it was put forward as a statement faithful to Witherspoon’s purposes and appropriate to a new century and a new millennium.

**To be continued ...
someday soon, we hope!**

NOTES

- ¹ Earlier summaries of the origins and history of the Witherspoon Society are Andrew E. Murray, "The Journey of the Witherspoon Society: A Dream of Justice," *Network News*, May/June 1989, p. 3; Robb Gwaltney, "The Beginnings of the Witherspoon Society: One Person's View," *Network News*, Fall 1996, p. 18, and Willem Bodisco Massink, "A Review of Twenty Years of the Witherspoon Society's Existence Through the Eyes of *The Network News*," *Network News*, May/June 1993, pp. 9-12. Carl Dudley led a collective recollection of Presbyterian and Witherspoon history during the Twenty-fifth Anniversary Gathering in 1998. Personal conversations with Bruce Tischler, Robb Gwaltney, and Joe Dempsey have been especially helpful.
- ² See the special issue of *Church & Society*, November-December 1987, devoted to Hawkins and his influence, and the shorter article by James H. Smylie, "Edler Garnet Hawkins (1908-1977): First African-American Moderator," *Presbyterian Outlook*, August 5-12, 2002.
- ³ John Filiatreau, "Work-and-Worship 'Boot Camp' Turned Out Battle-Ready Ministers," *Presbyterian News Service*, May 28, 1999.
- ⁴ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 179, 214-16, 224.
- ⁵ This is traced in Mark Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left: "Christianity and Crisis" Magazine, 1941-1993* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).
- ⁶ Letter from Joseph G. Dempsey, June 11, 2002.
- ⁷ Letter from Joseph G. Dempsey, June 11, 2002.
- ⁸ Personal conversation with Bruce Tischler, July 8, 1999.
- ⁹ Many of the comments are suggested by John R. Fry, *The Trivialization of the United Presbyterian Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).
- ¹⁰ See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 167, 295, and 342-54.
- ¹¹ Fry, pp. 10-11, 44-47, 68-69.
- ¹² Message from Beth A. Bensman, Presbyterian Historical Society, July 26, 2002.
- ¹³ E-mail messages from Joseph G. Dempsey, December 14 and 18, 2001; letter dated June 11, 2002.
- ¹⁴ "The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men," Preached in Princeton May 17, 1776, *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, Edited by Thomas Miller (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), pp. 126-47, at pp. 140-41. See also the remarks by former Stated Clerk William P. Thompson, "The Witherspoon Society and the Presbyterian Debacle," *Network News*, Summer 1994, pp. 16-18.
- ¹⁵ "The Witherspoon Society: A Network for Action," September, 1972, Witherspoon Society Archives.
- ¹⁶ Draft, "The Witherspoon Society: A View to the Future," by Robert M. Gwaltney, Chairman, December 1977.
- ¹⁷ "A Recruitment Model," March, 1973, Witherspoon Society Archives.
- ¹⁸ 1974 Report to the General Assembly, Witherspoon Society Archives.
- ¹⁹ "Proposal for Theological Reflection," Neill Q. Hamilton, 1973.
- ²⁰ Letter by Charles C. West to Dieter T. Hessel, January 8, 1973.
- ²¹ Memorandum from Joe Dempsey to Dieter Hessel, Neill Hamilton, and Jack Yost, January 19, 1973.
- ²² Letter from Neill Hamilton to Joe Dempsey, January 23, 1973.
- ²³ Note from Joseph G. Dempsey to Lynn Reade, December 16, 1997.
- ²⁴ *Network News*, February 1976, pp. 4-8.
- ²⁵ A brief report on the organizing conference was drawn up soon after the event by Bruce Tischler and sent to others asking for their corrections.

- ²⁶ *Monday Morning*, February, 1978.
- ²⁷ *Network News*, November 30, 1973.
- ²⁸ Kent Organ, "The Unmuzzling of the Advisory Council," *Network News*, July, 1974, pp. 7-8.
- ²⁹ *Network News*, January 1977, p. 1.
- ³⁰ *Network News*, October, 1976, p. 1.
- ³¹ Letter from Jeanne C. Marshall, Chairperson, Advisory Council on Church and Society, to Rev. William F. Keesecker and Rev. G. Daniel Little, UPCUSA, August 12, 1976.
- ³² Letter from John C. Clement to Oscar J. McCloud, September 30, 1976.
- ³³ *Network News*, January 1975; May 1975.
- ³⁴ Letter from Alma Rhoades to "Witherspoon Friends," April 30, 1975.
- ³⁵ *Network News*, November, 1974, p. 1.
- ³⁶ Memo from Robb Gwaltney to Executive Committee, October 25, 1981.
- ³⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, November 12-14, 1982.
- ³⁸ Letter from Robert M. Gwaltney, February 1, 2002.
- ³⁹ "Death Claims John Conner," *Network News*, March/April 1983, p. 1; Dieter Hessel, "The Public Ministry of John T. Conner," *Network News*, May/June 1983, pp. 6-7; "A Living Memorial to John Conner," *Network News*, July/August 1983.
- ⁴⁰ Networking Funding Proposal by Shirley DeHority, Third Draft, 1983.
- ⁴¹ *News Notes*, June, 1973.
- ⁴² Minutes of Meeting of Steering Committee, October 23-24, 1973, summarized in *Network News*, November 30, 1973.
- ⁴³ *Network News*, October, 1974, pp. 4-5.
- ⁴⁴ *Network News*, June, 1975, pp. 1 and 5.
- ⁴⁵ *Network News*, April 1979, p. 3.
- ⁴⁶ Letter from Matthew J. Welde, Executive Director of Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, to Robb Gwaltney, Treasurer of the Witherspoon Society, May 12, 1981.
- ⁴⁷ "Alternative Housing for General Assembly," *Network News* May/June, 1973, p. 1.
- ⁴⁸ Don Stroud, "The LGBT Liberation Movement in the PCUSA, 1970-2001," *More Light Update*, November-December 2001, p. 12.
- ⁴⁹ Minutes of the Annual Meeting, February 27-28, 1976.
- ⁵⁰ "A Critique," by John Fry, February (?) 1978. Fry adds two pages summarizing the positions taken by Witherspoon and the coverage given in the *Network News*.
- ⁵¹ Letter of Richard H. Lovelace to John H. Stevens and Harry G. Brahams, March 11, 1978.
- ⁵² Statement by Rev. Thomas Gillespie, *Church & Society*, May-June 1978, pp. 22-24.
- ⁵³ Memorandum from Robb Gwaltney to Hank Bremer, August 13, 1998.
- ⁵⁴ *Network News*, October 1978, p. 2.
- ⁵⁵ *Network News*, October 1979, p. 2.
- ⁵⁶ Unpublished editorial by John M. Mulder, submitted to the *Presbyterian Outlook*, undated (this editorial, never published by the *Outlook*, was sent to the author by Robert H. Bullock, Jr., on May 29, 1998).
- ⁵⁷ Quarterly letter to Witherspoon members, August 23, 1978.
- ⁵⁸ "COWAC Leader Says 'No, Not Yet' to Presbyterian Hopes for Union," Interview with Elizabeth Verdesi, *Network News*, May, 1981, pp. 1 and 5.
- ⁵⁹ "Steering Committee Asks Important Questions About Plan for Reunion of Presbyterians," *Network News*, January 1982, pp. 1, 4.
- ⁶⁰ Robert C. Lamar, "The Plan for Reunion," *Witherspoon Connection*, April, 1982; *Network News*, April, 1982, pp. 1, 3.
- ⁶¹ "Presbyterian Reunion," *Witherspoon Connection*, July-August 1982.

- ⁶² Memorandum by Robb Gwaltney to the Executive Committee, September 28, 1982.
- ⁶³ Ned W. Edwards, "The Symposium on the Confession of 1967 — And Concerns for Reunion," *Network News*, November/December, 1982, p. 8.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
- ⁶⁵ Bob Hasek, "Another Perspective on Reunion," *Network News*, November/December 1982, p. 9.
- ⁶⁶ Letter by Robb Gwaltney to Elaine Wareham, October 30, 1982.
- ⁶⁷ David J. McGown, "Why Witherspooners Are For Reunion," *Network News*, December, 1982, p. 3.
- ⁶⁸ Confidential Notes by Elaine Wareham on Steering Committee Meeting, November 12-14, 1982.
- ⁶⁹ "Remembering Aubrey Brown," *Presbyterian Outlook*, September 7, 1998, p. 5.
- ⁷⁰ Jean Triplett, "The 195th General Assembly: A Perspective," *Network News*, July/August 1983, p. 1.
- ⁷¹ Memo from Robb Gwaltney to Executive Committee, June 19, 1983.
- ⁷² Minutes of the Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, June 12, 1983.
- ⁷³ Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro: A History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966).
- ⁷⁴ Letter from William L. Arthur to George L. Hunt, editor of *The Presbyterian Outlook*, October 18, 1983; see also "Seeds in the South," by E.T. Thompson, Jr., *Network News*, May/June 1984, 6.
- ⁷⁵ Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, September 29-October 1, 1983.
- ⁷⁶ Letter from Ernest T. Thompson, Jr., to Shirley DeHority et al., November 15, 1983.
- ⁷⁷ Letter from Ernest T. Thompson, Jr., to members of the Executive Committee, July 3, 1985.
- ⁷⁸ Letter from Andrew E. Murray to Ernest T. Thompson, Jr., July 11, 1985.
- ⁷⁹ Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee, October 10-11, 1986.
- ⁸⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, June 5, 1984.
- ⁸¹ Letter from George Laird Hunt to Paul A. Lucia, December 3, 1980; letter from George Laird Hunt to Jean Triplett, January 4, 1983.
- ⁸² Letter from F. Wellford Hobbie to Ernest T. Thompson, Jr., November 17, 1983.
- ⁸³ *Network News*, September/October 1983, pp. 5-6.
- ⁸⁴ "Public Sanctuary: An Appeal to Conscience," *Network News*, March/April 1985, p. 1;
- ⁸⁵ "Presbyterian Advocates Formed," *Network News*, January/February 1984, p. 3.
- ⁸⁶ See *Presbyterians and Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance?* by Dana W. Wilbanks and Ronald H. Stone (New York: Advisory Council on Church and Society, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., 1985), and *Peacemaking? or Resistance? Presbyterian Perspectives*, edited by Ted M. Dorman (Nashville: Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom, 1986). Ignored in the attack was the fuller set of contributions in *The Peacemaking Struggle: Militarism and Resistance*, edited by Ronald H. Stone and Dana W. Wilbanks (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985).
- ⁸⁷ See my account of a meeting of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee, "Who Is Above the Battle?" *Christianity and Crisis* April 7, 1986), 46: 105-7.
- ⁸⁸ *Nashville Banner*, January 25, 1990.
- ⁸⁹ Ned Edwards, "A Sudden Change of Rule and Practice: Witherspoon Frustration at General Assembly," *Network News*, July/August, 1985, p. 3.
- ⁹⁰ Letter from Bruce Tischler to Andrew and Dorothea Murray, July 20, 1985.
- ⁹¹ "The Witherspoon Society," enclosed with letter to members from Don Marshall, December 1, 1985.
- ⁹² Letter of Dorothea Murray to the Executive Committee, attached to Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, March 19-21, 1987.

- ⁹³ Networking Funding Proposal by Shirley DeHority, Third Draft, 1983.
- ⁹⁴ Linda Woodard-Holsombeck, "The Witherspoon Society: A Model of Prophetic Ministry," prepared for Models of Prophetic Ministry, taught by Hal M. Warheim, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Fall, 1985.
- ⁹⁵ The Minutes of the Executive Committee, September 21-22, 1984, indicate that they were Jean and M.M. Triplett.
- ⁹⁶ Letter to Members from Bruce Tischler, President, January 8, 1985.
- ⁹⁷ Letter to Members from Don Marshall for the Executive Committee, December 1, 1985.
- ⁹⁸ Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee, October 10-11, 1986.
- ⁹⁹ Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee, October 10-11, 1986.
- ¹⁰⁰ Christian T. Iosso, "The Bible in the Brief Statement of Faith," *Network News*, May/June, 1988, pp. 6-7.
- ¹⁰¹ "Proposed Brief Statement of Reformed Faith," *Network News*, July/August, 1988, p. 13.
- ¹⁰² See the full-scale book by Judith A. Bechtel, *Building the Beloved Community: Maurice McCrackin's Life for Peace and Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).
- ¹⁰³ Letter from Charles P. Forbes to Bruce Tischler, August 5, 1986.
- ¹⁰⁴ "Assembly Affirms Restoration of McCrackin," *Network News*, July/August, 1987, p. 9.
- ¹⁰⁵ Gene TeSelle and Bruce Tischler, "An Overview of the 201st General Assembly," *Network News*, July/August 1989, p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁶ "The 202nd General Assembly Divorces Chapter Nine Organizations," *Network News*, July/August, 1990, p. 7.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Cf. also Eugene TeSelle, "Presbyterians Question 'Special Organizations,'" *Christian Century*, July 11-18, 1990.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ned Edwards, "Why Mary Ann Lundy Was Fired," *Network News*, Summer 1994, p. 9.
- ¹⁰⁹ *A Moment to Decide: The Crisis in Mainstream Presbyterianism*, with research by Lewis C. Daly, a preface by Ann Hale Johnson, Chair of the Board of Union Theological Seminary, and a Foreword by Robert W. Bohl (Scarborough, NJ, 2000).
- ¹¹⁰ G. Daniel Little, "Crisis in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," *Presbyterian Outlook*, June 12, 2000.
- ¹¹¹ K. Lawrence Chang, "From Chautauqua to Semper Reformanda," *Network News* Summer 1995, pp. 12-13.
- ¹¹² Robert J. Stone, "Looking Ahead: A Program Suggestion," *Network News*, Summer 1995, pp. 13-14.
- ¹¹³ E-mail message from Larry Chang to Harold Barton, December 8, 1999.

Witherspoon Society logos



1974



1994



2002

In 1974 a logo — a sun with rays like sawteeth, to signify that the Society was on the “cutting edge” of the life of the church — was designed for the Witherspoon brochure by Dave Schidt of Studio 2 Graphic Arts in Denver. This was soon used for *Network News* and other publications. In 1994 the Executive Committee announced a search for a new logo, and the winner was John Van Nuys of Rushville, Indiana, who suggested symbols of four Witherspoon emphases: justice, peace, integrity of creation, and inclusiveness in church and society. Art work was done by Emily Uhl of Philadelphia. In late 2002 yet another new logo was adopted, expressing the commitment to justice which has always been at the heart of Witherspoon's mission – along with our joy in doing the work we are called to do. So, raise the banners and let justice roll down!