

A Church of Community Organizers

How the United Church of Christ was transformed into a political machine for the Left

By Susan Bradford

Summary: For decades the Left has worked to turn churches into one more pressure group that will serve its political agenda. One of the saddest examples is the denomination known as the United Church of Christ, whose two most famous members are Barack Obama and his longtime pastor, the notorious Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

I am a longtime member of the United Church of Christ, baptized and confirmed within the church. My grandfather, Judge William C. Dixon, served on the committee that established the founding UCC constitution. This denomination, which was formed from the merger of the Congregational, Evangelical, and Reformed Churches, traces to the Pilgrims and to the congregationalists who helped slaves escape to freedom through the underground railroad during the American Civil War.

The UCC also shares an affinity with the French Huguenots of Le Chambon sur Lignon, celebrated for the heroic efforts of Pastor André Trocmé, who harbored Jews in this quaint French village while Nazis marched through Vichy, France. Trocmé's heroism, documented in Philip Hallie's inspiring book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, dramatizes how perfect love and unflinching courage, as exemplified by Trocmé and his congregation, can overcome evil. Once the Nazis



Rev. Jeremiah Wright (center) with Barack Obama, a member of his flock, in an undated photograph.

descended upon the village, they encountered peaceful resistance and immediately backed down, sparing the lives of the Jews. Not a single shot was fired nor drop of blood spilled. What Trocmé and his congregation demonstrated was the nobility of character the UCC inculcated in its members. The congregants did not need to be prompted by the government or community organizers to express their allegiance to God and to serve their neighbor. Their outpouring of love and charity emanated from within.

In recent years, the church has morphed into

something that neither I nor other members recognize. Ministers often preach with cynical resignation to empty pews. When Barack Obama arrived on the national stage, I was intrigued to learn of his affiliation with the UCC and inspired by his message of hope

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and change, which is central to the heart of the denomination. The hateful rhetoric spewed by his pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, at the Trinity UCC in Chicago was confusing, but every denomination has its fiery preacher and rogue. Wright's words condemning the United States and denigrating whites were antithetical to the spirit of the denomination. I wondered: Did Wright not know that white congregationalists were champions of the Civil Rights Movement? How could a man who professed to be a man of God still harbor such hatred in his heart and condemn the exceptionalism of the United States, which was founded on Judeo-Christian principles?

Like many other Christians, I attend church services to nourish my soul, rather than hear political diatribes. And yet so often in recent years UCC churches have been inclined to set the Bible aside and preach only "social justice," while offering opportunities for involvement in various forms of political

Editor: Matthew Vadum

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Address:

1513 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

Long-Distance: (800) 459-3950

E-mail Address:

mvadum@capitalresearch.org

Web Site:

<http://www.capitalresearch.org>

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expression, like marching for illegal immigrants and participating in gay pride parades. Privately, many congregants have disagreed with the church's position on gay marriage and the Affordable Health Care Act (known as Obamacare), but church leaders have not consulted them. Yet the UCC Synod claims to speak on Capitol Hill for its million-member denomination.

Disappointed with the direction of my once-beloved denomination, I decided to find out why the UCC has strayed so far from its original mission of being a cohesive force for all of Christendom and instead become congregations of community organizers and activists for the Democratic Party.

Socialism Enters

After extensive research, I was saddened to discover that my denomination had transformed into a vehicle to stir up revolution, exploit racial division, expand entitlements, and usher in a global socialist society. In this context, Wright's rhetoric makes sense.

Studying the UCC's history, I discovered that socialism entered into the church through the Federal Council of Churches (since renamed the National Council of Churches) and the World Council of Churches, which was infiltrated by Soviet agents in the 1960s. The infiltration and destruction of the church was gradual, but devastating. The UCC wasn't the only Christian church to fall, but it has had one of the most spectacular falls.

What better channels for leftists to project their agenda into the country than through the churches, where many of the nation's good people congregate to raise their families and instill morals in their children. Church members are also inclined to volunteer their

time for charity work without reservation, not suspecting that those activities may have a hidden political agenda the volunteers may not support. When they enter the church doors, their hearts and minds are genuinely open. Few are prepared for the wolves in sheep's clothing who lie in their midst.

Unifying the Churches

The movement to unify the churches in the United States began in the 1930s, culminating in the unification of the Congregational, Evangelical, and Reformed churches in 1957, which gave birth to the UCC.

The UCC had traditionally adopted an intellectual approach to Christianity that encouraged members to read the Bible and study and think for themselves. The minister served the role of the instructor, an educated teacher who had cultivated a sophisticated understanding of the Bible, but who was ultimately fallible. Only Jesus and the Word of God were considered infallible, and therefore congregants were encouraged to establish a relationship with Him, as opposed to allowing church leaders to dictate how they were to live their lives. Tolerance for a diversity of opinions was always encouraged, if not celebrated.

Over time, however, church leaders came to believe that the Bible was a living document open to reinterpretation and that as society acquired greater knowledge, one's understanding of the Bible should evolve accordingly. This approach laid the foundation for moral relativism. Since scripture was no longer infallible, forces within the church decided that they could interpret the Gospel to support whatever political agenda they were touting at the time.

This was not what my grandfather and other UCC founders intended. Injecting politics into its evangelism, the UCC Synod has passed resolutions endorsing political positions intended to advance a socialist “social gospel.” In the process, the denomination has dangerously crossed, if not bulldozed, the wall separating church and state and morphed into a political lobbying shop.

Originally, the ecumenical vision of the UCC’s founding sought to unite the denominations so they could be a cohesive force for good in the world. By combining efforts, it was hoped, the churches could multiply and unleash the goodness of the congregations to benefit mankind. “In the realm of service, the purpose of the United Church is ... dedicated not narrowly to meeting human need only where there is a hope of increasing the population of the church, but to meeting human need without asking further questions, simply because it is human need,” wrote Douglas Horton, one of the UCC’s founders.

The body at the top of the UCC is the General Synod, which establishes policy and leadership for the churches with the understanding that all churches don’t have to support it. Such a structure only works when the people who operate within it are noble. When so much power is consolidated at the top, the organization becomes rife for mischief, as individuals are tempted to use the vast influence at their disposal for self-serving or political ends.

Born of two world wars, the church sought to forge unity among Christendom throughout the world, and this led many of its leaders to see a similar political expression for this vision in the United Nations. In time, the desire for world government transformed



into a quest for a global redistribution of wealth, which of course would give a chosen few redistributors the power to control the many. And so the UCC leadership began to advocate eliminating borders altogether and allowing unchecked immigration and a reallocation of wealth from the haves to the have-nots. While the UCC had traditionally celebrated differences among people, its leaders now seek to exploit those differences in classic “community organizer” fashion: stirring up racial, class, and familial tensions for political gain. The focus of the church moved away from individual acts of charity,

inspired from the heart, and replaced them with government-mandated giving. Noble rhetoric, which drew its vocabulary from the Bible, provided moral cover for private power grabs, aided and abetted by community organizers.

The Evolution of Ecumenism

The United Church of Christ emerged from the twentieth-century ecumenical movement. The ecumenicists sought to unite the world by forging alliances and partnerships among Protestant denominations. The Federal Council of Churches was established in 1908 and later renamed the National Council

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of Churches. The ecumenicists, who were perceived as attempting to consolidate church control, were not well received by many congregations, who peppered them with questions and viewed them skeptically. Traditional churches did not wish to submit themselves to a national body which sought to unite and mobilize churches for social and political action, nor did they wish to be directed from distant elite bureaucracies. A number of church leaders also questioned both the motives and methods of the ecumenicists.

One conservative evangelist, Edgar C. Bundy, for example, accused the ecumenists of being socialists. Bundy quickly became an expert on liberal churches, which he characterized as a destructive force in the United States. The FBI used his collection of books, maps, and files for research.

After retiring from the Air Force, Bundy joined the ministry and became a religious scholar, cultivating relationships with a number of prominent conservatives, including William F. Buckley, the founder of *National Review*, and Ronald Reagan. Bundy shared the growing skepticism of the ecumenical movement. "Many of the largest missionary societies in the United States and throughout the world did not wish to be represented by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, and they never became part of that organization," Bundy wrote in *Collectivism in the Churches*.

Bundy concluded that the scriptures showed that political activism, liberal or conservative, had no place in church. "The truth is that Jesus Christ was not interested in lobbying before Pilate, Agrippa, or Caesar's government for the betterment of social, economic, or politi-

cal conditions," Bundy argued. "His Gospel was the Gospel of personal salvation and to the Herodians. He said: 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are of God'.... Neither Jesus Christ nor the Apostles ever called upon the temporal rulers of their day to address their conferences, nor did they ever call upon governments to advance the cause of the church."

Community Organizers and Rockefellers' Dollars

Two years after the Federal Council was established in the United States, representatives from Protestant denominations and missionary societies, principally from North America and Northern Europe, convened at the United Free Church in Edinburgh, Scotland, for the World Missionary Conference, which was chaired and organized by John Mott, a Methodist layman and community organizer who would later become a close friend and confidante of John D. Rockefeller Jr., a leading champion of the ecumenical movement. After Mott was appointed the first honorary president of the World Council of Churches, Rockefeller, a philanthropist and heir to the Standard Oil fortune, donated \$1 million to the Friends of the World Council of Churches, which then established a Commission on International Relations whose stated purpose was to "stimulate the churches of all nations to a more vigorous expression of the demand of the Christian conscience in relation to the political policies of governments."

Mott laid down "marching orders" intended for "members of every Protestant church around the world in an effort to expand Christianity." He later won the Nobel Peace Prize for establishing Protestant student

organizations. He was the world's first community organizer, a tradition Obama would follow decades later. Mott also courted the financial elite and enlisted them to invest in the ecumenical movement.

As an "apostle of unity," Mott convinced progressive Protestant denominations to set aside doctrinal differences in the interests of advancing "a vision of worldwide Christianity based on concepts they believed Christians around the world could agree on and work together to implement." The movement was modeled after the streamlined and efficient organizational structure of Rockefeller's Standard Oil, which was ruthless in its efforts to secure monopolies for its businesses and drive competition out of its markets.

The ecumenical movement that endeavored to unite the churches under a central authority developed in concert with the movement to unite the nations under global structures like the League of Nations and its successor organization, the United Nations. "The League of Churches was to become a union of all churches on faith and order as the final purpose of the League of Nations," remarked Willem Adolph Visser T. Hooft, a Dutch theologian who was later appointed Secretary General of the World Council of Churches. "The dream dreamt by so many philosophers, the dream of international order, based on law and justice, seemed at last to become a political reality."

A Political Agenda

The political agenda that underlay these dreams had long been clear. As far back as 1916, the Federal Council of Churches referred to Jesus as a "social reformer" and the "first socialist." The president of

Harding College observed in 1950 that the ecumenicists advocated “the extensive use of taxation to reduce inequalities in income.” Yet, “this advocacy is contrary to the fundamental principles of the American way of life and our historic American concept of taxation,” he said. “Taxation in America was conceived as a fair and sound method of financing government—and for no other purpose—but socialists long ago found it to be their handiest instrument for achieving abolition of private property and subjugation of a people.”

Many observed that the ecumenicists espoused principles opposed to free enterprise. For example, through its Department of Christian Social Relations, the Federal Council of Churches published a pamphlet entitled, “Social Ideals of the Churches,” which counseled churches to advocate “the subordination of speculation and the profit motive to the creative and cooperative spirit” and a “wider and fairer distribution of the wealth.” As Dr. William Paton, the co-secretary of the World Council of Churches said, “Collectivism is coming, whether we like it or not.” Secretary of State John Foster Dulles affirmed in the *New York Times*: “We are aiming at a top organization, international in character, to coordinate the thinking and actions of Protestant denominations through their national organizations. We will attempt to make it do for religion what labor does through the World Federation of Trade Unions.”

The Obama Connection

Some years after these pioneering community organizers in the UCC’s orbit there arose a relatively unremarkable man by the name of Barack Obama. By the time he connected with the Rev. Wright at Trinity UCC, he

was already working in a network of liberal activists who had hijacked the denomination for private political gain. Obama eventually communicated the inspiring message of the United Church of Christ to the nation. The message publicly stressed the need for unity among people for the common good, while privately advancing the agenda of the Left. Obama carried water for the powerful political interests aligned with the church hierarchy. He had just the right amount of charisma to pull it off.

And so not long ago an ordinary man—a community organizer, no less—was heralded as the “Messiah.” Many liberals in the media appeared mesmerized by him. Obama famously excited Chris Matthews so much that the MSNBC host felt a “thrill” run up his leg. In February 2008, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, a friend of the Rev. Wright at Trinity UCC, went further than Matthews, telling an audience: “You are instruments of change that God is going to use to bring about universal change, and that is why Barack has captured the youth. And he has involved people in a political process that they didn’t care anything about. That’s a sign. When the Messiah speaks, the youth will hear, and the Messiah is absolutely speaking. Brothers and sisters, Barack Obama to me is a herald of the Messiah.”

Organizing Congregations

Obama’s connections to congregations led by community organizers goes back to before his alliance with the Rev. Wright. Two years after his 1983 graduation from Columbia University, Barack Obama was appointed director of Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART), a Chicago-based organization that has, since 1982, trained over 10,000 community leaders and 150 professional

community organizers and won victories on various issues ranging from multi-million dollar investments in affordable housing and massive expansions of public transportation to health care reform in several major metropolitan cities. “DART’s work is an authentic and highly effective answer to God’s call to do justice,” remarked Dr. Robert Linthicum, the author of *Transforming Power* and an admirer of Saul Alinsky and ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now).

Congregation-based community organizations (CBCOs) have influenced the Obama administration’s policy choices and helped drive its agenda through Congress. The United Church of Christ has been at the vanguard of advancing the social gospel through CBCOs. Its preachers have called upon their flocks to “come together to answer

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God's call to love our neighbors, stand with the marginalized, and work towards a more just society." As a member of Wright's Trinity Church, Obama has worked in tandem with community organizations which give expression to their faith by writing legislators, signing petitions, picketing on the streets, manning phone banks, and otherwise exerting political pressure on congressional offices.

Among the most prominent congregation-based community organizations affiliated with the UCC are (1) DART; (2) Industrial Areas Foundation; (3) People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO); and (4) the Gamaliel Foundation. I have already sketched DART; here are brief portraits of the others.

➤ *Industrial Areas Foundation.* Founded by *Rules for Radicals* author Saul Alinsky in 1940, the IAF network trains and mobilizes community organizers, identifies and grooms leaders, and develops grassroots strategy to provide a powerful catalyst for "social change." Inspired by the social gospel, the IAF has sought affordable housing for the poor and lobbies the government for subsidized public housing and low interest loans for the poor.

In 1982, the IAF helped implement the nation's first "Nehemiah housing effort." Promising to eradicate urban blight and stabilize depressed communities, the East Brooklyn Congregation, an IAF affiliated group, built 2,900 new town homes; Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development constructed nearly 900 homes in Baltimore; the Philadelphia Interfaith Act built 135 homes in Philadelphia; and another 147 homes were developed through the Wash-

ington Interfaith Network (WIN). All homes were subsidized by taxpayers, many of whom were struggling to pay their own mortgages or who had lost their homes through reckless policies pursued by the banks heavily lobbied to extend the dream of home ownership to "the least of these."

The *Boston Globe* reports that many of these subsidized housing projects are little more than uninhabitable slums, including Grove Parc Plaza, which was developed by Obama cronies Valerie Jarrett's Habitat Company.

➤ *PICO.* With a friend in Obama, PICO mobilized one million voters for Obama's re-election campaign in 2012 to "advance the cause of economic justice."

"There is a growing sense of moral outrage among people of faith who see working families losing their homes, their jobs, their health care, and their retirement savings," the PICO Network announced. The group added, "Under the voter-contact effort, known as the 'Land of Opportunity' campaign, PICO faith leaders pledged to reach out to under-represented communities and register 75,000 new voters. By November, the coordinated mobilization will contact one million religious voters."

Clergy in 10 states agreed to hold events to unveil civic engagement plans on behalf of their favored candidates. These were the activist clergy who had worked on a number of issues and ballot initiatives, including capping payday loans in Missouri, challenging budget caps on schools and community services in Florida, and protecting "voting rights" in Minnesota. To this end, they engaged their congregations and communities in training programs, rallies, and voter registration

drives among the PICO network, which incorporated 1,000 religious congregations in more than 200 cities and towns through its 60 local and state federations who were ready to be mobilized to lobby the government for taxpayer funds and legislative measures on behalf of "the least of these."

➤ *Gamaliel Foundation.* Before embarking upon a career in politics, Obama worked as a consultant and instructor for the Gamaliel Foundation, which takes its name from the New Testament. Since the first Christians were considered a threat to the established authorities in Israel, some wanted to kill them, but the wise rabbi Gamaliel stood up and said, "keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them" (Acts 5:38-39).

The Gamaliel Foundation provides leadership training for agitators, helps build community organizations, and drives local and national social justice campaigns. Gamaliel is the only national community organizing network to blend grassroots organizing with research and policy advocacy. By its own accounts, the group draws spiritual and intellectual sustenance from the Bible, Torah, Koran, and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Founded in 1968, Gamaliel began by supporting organizations, like the Contract Buyers League, which challenged discrimination at banks and savings and loans institutions against African-Americans.

Since 1986, the Chicago-based Gamaliel has championed social justice issues in areas ranging from immigration and health care to transportation at the local, state, regional, and national levels. By wrapping itself in the

words of Martin Luther King Jr., Gamaliel has used community organizers to pursue “progressive social transformation rooted in the faith values of its (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish) membership.” (The Gamaliel Foundation was profiled in the July 2010 issue of *Foundation Watch*.)

Conclusion

Barack Obama, as a community organizer, was the perfect embodiment of the UCC and the wider movement of ecumenism and social justice. Once the ecumenicists gained a foothold in the church, the focus of the UCC moved from salvation to political activism. The gentle guidance of the Bible was dismissed as the fruit of an outdated book that made people feel guilty, judged, and excluded.

Instead of refining the characters of church members, the church focused on mobilizing activists on behalf of policies few church members knew much about. Yet, the church would claim to speak for its members on matters ranging from health care to immigration, encouraging congregants to take action on a range of social issues through congregation-based community organizations like the Industrial Areas Foundation.

Whether or not these new organizations will manage to live for millennia like the Christian churches is unclear. But their ability to affect America’s politics is beyond dispute.

Susan Bradford is a Washington, D.C.-based investigative journalist who authored a forthcoming book entitled, The United Church of Heist. Bradford’s grandfather wrote the UCC’s founding constitution.

Briefly Noted

An ultra-secretive left-wing money machine for super-rich radicals is bringing more representatives of Big Labor into the fold, in hopes of preventing a possible Republican takeover of the U.S. Senate this November. New members of the **George Soros-dominated Democracy Alliance** identified by the Washington Free Beacon are **Noel Beasley**, president of **Workers United**, a textile union affiliated with the **Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**, and **Keith Mestrich**, president of the union-owned **Amalgamated Bank**. Other new members from Big Labor include **Larry Cohen**, president of the **Communications Workers of America**, and **Randi Weingarten**, president of the **American Federation of Teachers**. The names of the members were found on an official Alliance document Soros's son Jonathan left behind at the group's meeting in the Chicago Ritz hotel.

Other new members of the Democracy Alliance, a donors' collaborative focused on funding left-wing political infrastructure, include **Adam Abram** (insurance and real estate), **Rick Segal** (financial services), and **Paul Boskind** (behavioral health). Among the heirs and heiresses to recently join the group are **Amy Goldman** (real estate), **Henry van Ameringen** (manufacturing), and **New School** professor **Philip Munger**, son of **Berkshire Hathaway** vice chairman **Charles Munger**.

Judicial Watch released a new batch of internal **IRS** documents revealing that the agency's handling of applications from Tea Party nonprofits was directed out of the agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C., contrary to earlier official denials by the White House. The documents also show extensive pressure on the IRS by Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) to shut down conservative-leaning tax-exempt organizations. The IRS emails by then-tax exempt division chief Lois Lerner detail her misleading explanations to investigators about the targeting of Tea Party organizations. The documents were handed over because Judicial Watch filed an October 2013 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit after the agency failed to respond to four FOIA requests dating back to May 2013.

The **Internal Revenue Service** revoked the charitable status of a conservative nonprofit group that disseminated statements critical of Democrats **Hillary Clinton** and **John Kerry** a decade ago. The **Patrick Henry Center for Individual Liberty** headquartered in Manassas, Virginia, "has shown a pattern of deliberate and consistent intervention in political campaigns" and issued "repeated statements supporting or opposing various candidates by expressing its opinion of the respective candidate's character and qualifications," according to an IRS determination. The tax agency found that the group functioned as an "action organization" by publishing alerts on its website for columns written by its president, former FBI agent **Gary Aldrich**, in which he was harshly critical of Clinton and Kerry, who at the time were both U.S. senators. The ruling takes effect July 1 unless appealed by the group.

Former Homeland Security Secretary **Tom Ridge** quit **Michael Bloomberg's** new gun control group, delivering a setback for the former New York mayor after he said he will spend \$50 million on efforts associated with the group and this year's midterm elections, according to reports. A Ridge spokesman said the former **Bush** administration cabinet member does not want to be part of an attack on gun rights by the new group, which is called "Everytown for Gun Safety." "When I signed on as an adviser to Everytown, I looked forward to a thoughtful and provocative discussion about the toll gun violence takes on Americans," Ridge said. "After consultation with Everytown, I have decided that I am uncomfortable with their expected electoral work." Bloomberg's other anti-Second Amendment group, **Mayors Against Illegal Guns**, was profiled in the March 2014 *Organization Trends*.

We grieve a longtime supporter of **CRC**, **Kenneth Y. Tomlinson**, who died at the age of 69. Tomlinson spent most of his life at the *Reader's Digest*, where he retired as editor in chief in 1996. President **Reagan** nominated him to be director of the **Voice of America**, and President **Clinton** named him to the board of the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting**. Our condolences to his wife of 39 years, **Rebecca Moore Tomlinson**, and his family.