

THEIR VIEW

Coalition says conference undermines diversity

Members of the Moscow-Pullman community have recently raised important questions about pastor Douglas Wilson's views on racial slavery, women, and violence against gays. In response, Mr. Wilson and some of his supporters have conducted an extensive media campaign to denounce these people as "secular humanists," "Darwinists," or "radical progressives" who are driven by "hatred for the historic Christian gospel." Efforts to have Mr. Wilson clear the record on his views about slavery, misogyny, and homosexuality have met with statements or denials that contradict the opinions clearly expressed in his extensive writings. In Wilson's spin, the real issues have become obscured. It is necessary that we place the facts before our community and explain our deep concern.

On Feb. 5-7, 2004, Credenda/Agenda's "Ninth Annual History Conference" will be at the University of Idaho. The event is sponsored by Wilson's congregation. Some of the featured speakers are:

■ Steven Wilkins, co-founder of the League of the South, a group identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a neo-Confederate hate group. In our opinion, this group is dedicated to southern secession and racial separatism. It's our understanding that, over the past decade, the neo-Confederate movement has recast the anti-civil rights agenda of hate groups like the KKK into religious terms.

■ George Grant, of King's Meadow Study Center in Tennessee. Grant is a major figure in the national Christian Reconstructionist movement, which seeks to subvert the U. S. constitution and replace it with a Christian theocracy. In his 1993 book



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Legislating Immorality (co-authored by Mark Horne), Grant advocates the death penalty for gays, saying "[t]here is no such option for homosexual offenses" except capital punishment (pp. 186-87).

■ Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. Like Grant, Wilson is a national figure in the Reconstruction movement.

He has been active in neo-Confederate networks since 1995. In 1996, he co-wrote (with Wilkins) a short booklet called *Southern Slavery, As It Was*. The book claims "[o]wning slaves is not an abomination" and alleges that African-American slave emancipation has led to "abortion, feminism, and sodomy" in today's society (pp. 21, 11).

■ Peter Leithart, a fellow at the New St. Andrews facility. In the conservative *Weekly Standard* (March 26, 2001), Leithart praised Holocaust denier and Reconstructionist J. Rousas Rushdoony as an "American original." Rushdoony's writings on the Holocaust and German casualties draw upon views expressed by Nazi collaborator Léon de Poncis and Holocaust denier David Irving. In the *New York Review of Books*, Joseph Lelyveld identifies Rushdoony as a "religious zealot and Holocaust denier" (June 12, 2003).

The centerpiece of the conference is Mr. Wilson's talk on R. L. Dabney. Dabney was a marginal religious figure in the antebellum South who has been appropriated by the neo-Confederate and Reconstructionist movements. Dabney was a secessionist,

proslavery apologist, and opponent of African-American education and interracial marriages.

We are concerned that this conference could negatively affect the general climate in our community. Several of the conference speakers, moreover, do not simply express intolerant views but actively issue "a call to arms" (in the words of George Grant) for their followers to put them into action. We are concerned because this type of hate speech has led to horror in our local past — most notably with Benjamin Matthew Williams, a Moscow resident and former UI student, who murdered a gay couple and burned three synagogues in northern California in 1999.

While the conference participants have the constitutional right to express their opinions, we feel we have an equal right to voice our disagreement. In so doing, we hope to raise community consciousness and promote a greater spirit of tolerance, diversity, and mutual respect within our community. In our view, the ideas expressed by Wilkins, Wilson, and Grant advocate intolerance, undermine diversity efforts, promote aggression based upon race, gender, and sexual orientation, and do violence to historical accuracy.

We invite you to join our efforts in promoting human rights, diversity, and true toleration in the Palouse.

Dale Graden is writing for the Equality Coalition. Those wishing additional information on these topics or interested in helping may visit the "Not on the Palouse" Web site at <www.tomandrodna.com/notonthepalouse> or the UI's office of Diversity and Human Rights at <www.webs.uidaho.edu/diversity>.