

People

News in the [July 27, 2010](#) issue

George Hunsinger, a professor of systematic theology at Princeton Seminary and founder in 2006 of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, has been awarded the Karl Barth Prize by the German Evangelical Church. Previous recipients have included Hans Küng, Eberhard Jüngel and John W. de Gruchy.

Cardinal **Walter Kasper**, 77, stepped down on July 1 from his nine-year Vatican post as president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity amid praise from the World Council of Churches. WCC general secretary Olav Fykse Tveit called Kasper an official with “a very deep theological understanding of our call to unity.” It was not known publicly who would succeed him until media reports June 30 said that Bishop **Kurt Koch**, 60, of Basel, Switzerland, was tapped by Pope Benedict XVI for the job. Tveit told journalists in Moscow at the end of an official visit to the Russian Orthodox Church that Koch was “well known for his openness and deep ecumenical commitment.” Metropolitan Hilarion, who heads Russian Orthodox external relations, said he hoped that Koch would pay particular attention to the “promising” dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox churches inasmuch as dialogue with Protestants “is in crisis today due to the liberalization of doctrine and moral teachings that is taking place.”

J. Lawrence Burkholder, 92, an influential figure in the Mennonite Church and president of Goshen College 1971–1984, died June 24 in Goshen, Indiana. Working with the Mennonite Central Committee during World War II, Burkholder flew DC3s as a volunteer over the Himalayas to Chinese refugees. It was a time, he said decades later, when “I was discovering complexity and ambiguity.” In the greater Mennonite Church, Burkholder sparked controversy with his philosophy on ambiguity. “While affirming points of emphasis in Anabaptism, I could not accept it uncritically in its ideological form,” he wrote in *The Limits of Perfection*. “When it comes to ambiguity, I contended that the world is a sea of good and evil, multiple demands, three-way obligations (triage), making ‘tragic necessity’ inevitable.” He taught at Goshen after returning to the U.S. in 1949 but joined Harvard Divinity School’s faculty in 1961. Said theologian Harvey Cox: “It could be said that he brought Harvard Divinity

School 'down to earth' from what had been an overemphasis on theoretical matters, but he did so with an impressive degree of intellectual acumen."

Nico Smith, 81, one of a small band of Afrikaner clerics who bucked the apartheid system by choosing to live in a black township, has died in Pretoria, the capital of South Africa. Smith was best known for leaving a theological teaching post at Stellenbosch University, the then-academic seat of Afrikaner power, to join the black offshoot of the dominant Dutch Reformed Church, or NGK as it is also known. Smith died June 19 of heart failure. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Uniting General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches observed a moment's silence June 21 to remember him. The communion's general secretary, Setri Nyomi, praised Smith as "one who stood strong as a prophet in the time of apartheid."