

Let us pray.

With The United Methodist Church about to enter General Conference 2020 (May 5-15) and decide the fate of our life together under Jesus Christ, let us pray: "O gracious God, we pray for your holy Church universal [including The United Methodist Church], that you would be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, establish it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of him who died and rose again, and ever lives to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen." (The United Methodist Book of Worship, #501; from The Book of Common Prayer)

2020 LIFEWATCH SERMON: "A PRAYER FOR A FORGETFUL PEOPLE"

by Dr. David F. Watson

What Is Truth?

As Pilate and Jesus stood facing one another, Pilate asked Jesus an ancient question: "What is truth?"

What is truth?

Is truth something we simply ascertain through logic? Is truth, as the positivists said, something that we must verify empirically? Is the idea of truth simply an exercise of power? Is truth my own, or is there something greater outside of me that tells me who I am, why I am here, and how I should live?

What is truth? The great irony, of course, is that as he asked the question, Pilate stood facing the one who is truth.

Christians have long proclaimed that truth is not just an idea. Truth is a person. Truth is Jesus.

Imagine that: standing in front of Jesus, the very incarnation of God. Standing before the one through whom all things came into being...and asking, "What is truth?"

Yet the church does this very thing all the time. We are a forgetful people, and as a result we are easily seduced by the spirit of the age.

We are a forgetful people, and sometimes we resemble Pilate more than we resemble Jesus.

Nevertheless, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (Psalm 145:8, NRSV here and following) And so God has given us a book of divine revelation to remind this forgetful people that there is truth, the very Word of God who became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.

What Came into Being in Him Was Life

Scripture is a way of reminding the forgetful Church, century after century, who and what truth is, and how we should live in light of the truth revealed to us in Jesus.

And so John begins his Gospel in this way: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:1-5)

John wants us to know that this Jesus is not just a teacher, not just a prophet, not just a king, but an enfleshment of the living God, who gave us life, and the life was the light of all people.

Think about that: John tells us that, apart from the Word of God who became flesh in Jesus, not one thing came into being. Everything that is came into being through the Word of God. Everything: planets, stars, time and space, ideas, wisdom, goodness and beauty. All these came into being through the Word. And yet, John holds up one aspect of creation over all others: life. What came into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

What came into being through the Word of God was life.

John could have said what came into being through the Word was righteousness, or what came into being through the Word was matter, or what came into being through the Word was holiness.

Instead, he holds up life.

What came into being in him was life.

That is why we are here today: because just as John holds up life in his account of the creation of all things, so we, the church, are called to hold up life in our proclamation.

Lifewatch is published by the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, a network of United Methodist clergy, laity, and churches.

It is sent, free of charge, to interested readers. Editor, Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth: 902 Pinckney Street, Whiteville NC 28472 (910)642-3376.

Administrator and Publicity/Outreach Coordinator, Mrs. Cindy Evans: P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338 (636)294-2344.

Gift checks should be made payable, and mailed, to: Lifewatch, P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338.

Email: lifewatch@charter.net/Website: www.lifewatch.org Copyright ©2020 by Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, Inc.

A Culture of Death

We are called to hold up life in a culture of death.

All around the world we treat life as if it is a commodity that we may buy and sell in the interest of convenience, prosperity, and security. Today, however, we gather before the March for Life. As thousands come together on the National Mall, we celebrate this movement that we call “pro-life.” But this term must mean more than that we oppose elective abortion. Most of the people who march today will be people of faith, people who understand that life is a gift from God and must be treated as such. Yet if we are honest, it is evident that whoever is in the White House, whoever sits on the Supreme Court, we are losing the battle in Western culture for hearts and minds in a war against life.

Consider the applause in the New York legislature over the legalization of late-term abortion.

Applause.

The killing of unborn children who are at eight, even nine, months of development *in utero* has now entered mainstream culture, and even generates applause.

At least segments of culture in the modern West speak openly of this as an acceptable moral alternative. Whereas the pro-choice movement once spoke of keeping abortion safe, legal, and rare, it is now held up as a positive good. Comedian Michelle Wolf joked before an audience that her abortion made her feel powerful, made her feel like God.

Her audience applauded.

Yes, in a way she was powerful. She used her power as a human agent, given to her by the same God who called her into being. She used the power of life and death, the same power that has eliminated almost all people with Down syndrome from Iceland, and which has eliminated 80-90 percent of people with Down syndrome, people like my own son, in the United States.

Perhaps someday we will hear applause for these deaths as well.

In the culture of death, we applaud death.

When did we become so callous? Or have we always been such, and as in the days of slavery, it has once again become socially acceptable openly to dehumanize some so that others may prosper?

Whether we are talking about abortion, euthanasia, gun violence, racism, immigration, healthcare, or poverty, the church is called to proclaim life in the midst of a culture of death. And to the extent that we bow the knee to ideologies, political parties, or platforms that feed into the culture of death, we have forgotten who we are, and we need to be reminded.

We are a forgetful people.

The Epistemic Consequences of Sin

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

The word we translate “overcome” in Greek is *katalambano*, and it also means “comprehend.”

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. This takes us back to Pilate. He did not comprehend Jesus. “What is truth?” he asked as he stood in

the very presence of truth. The darkness did not comprehend the light.

Along the same lines we recall the story in Mark in which the scribes accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the prince of demons. The scribes who accuse Jesus can’t tell the difference between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of demons. The darkness did not comprehend the light.

Consider the Pentecost story in Acts. A great crowd was gathered together. “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:2-4). And what’s more, we go on to read, everyone was hearing in his or her own language. It was the reversal of the Tower of Babel.

A mighty wind, tongues of fire, a miracle of understanding that empowers the preaching of the Apostles. We read that some were rightly amazed, “[b]ut others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine’” (Acts 2:13). In the face of so great a miracle, they sneer. “They’re drunk,” they say. The darkness did not comprehend the light.

There are many who will look at this gathering of the faithful from across the nation today and say that we’re the ones filled with new wine—that we are drunk with a desire for power, that this is about control, about taking away rights, about oppression.

But as people of God, people who have comprehended the light amidst darkness, we say, “No, today is about life. What came into being through the Word of God was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

The world in which we live has a powerful effect on the shape of our minds. And if we take seriously the reality of sin, the shaping of our minds by the world—no matter where we live—will form us into ways of thinking, speaking, and acting that are inconsistent with the will of God. No wonder we are so forgetful.

Theologians have called this the “epistemic consequence of sin.” Our minds are malformed. That’s why Paul tells us in Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Without transformation, we cannot discern the will of God.

Our minds require transformation. Our habits of mind, the lenses through which we see things, the assumptions on which we base our ideas—all of these have to change when we come to know Christ. God’s ways are not our ways. God’s thoughts are not our thoughts. And the Christian life is a process by which the Holy Spirit conforms our thoughts to God’s thoughts, and thus conforms our ways to God’s ways.

What Kind of Church Are We?

In the late first or early second century, Christians produced a document called the *Didache*. The name means “teaching.” It is short for *The Teaching of the Twelve*

Apostles. It is actually a manual for Christian living, probably used for people who were undergoing baptism.

The *Didache* begins like this: “There are two ways: one of life and one of death. And there is a great difference between the two ways.”

It is no less true today than in the ancient world. There is a way of life, and there is a way of death. And the differences between them are vast.

So today we hold up life.

Yes, I know that moral choices related to life and death can create great complexity. I understand this.

Yet what are the principles that govern our moral lives? Are they principles that assign value to human life? Are they principles that honor what God has called into being through the living Word, Jesus Christ? Are they principles rooted in Scripture, which remind us who we are as a people of God? Are they principles that protect the vulnerable from the relentless march of the culture of death?

I do not want to be part of a church that is indistinguishable in its values and way of life from the surrounding culture. I do not want to be part of a church that capitulates to a culture of death, or at best turns a blind eye to the devaluing of human life that proceeds apace in the world around us. I do not want to be part of a church that refuses to identify sin so as to sit comfortably in a culture that bows the knee to a new and false god every week.

I want to be part of a church that is rooted in the revelation of the Word of God; that honors the work of the Word of God in bringing all things into being, and, above all, in giving us life; that stands up for the most vulnerable people in the world.

I want to be part of a church that remembers who she is; a church that knows the truth and proclaims it, and is willing to stand apart, to stand in the gap, and to be ridiculed when necessary; a church that is willing to sacrifice in service to Jesus Christ.

I want to be part of a church that looks more like Jesus than Pilate. We know the truth. The truth is a person, the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. What came into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

Dr. Watson is Professor of New Testament, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Academic Dean at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH.♥

REVISITING “THE GOSPEL TRUTH ABOUT CHRIST’S CHURCH FOR UNITED METHODISTS”

The Special Report in the last issue of [Lifewatch](http://www.lifewatch.org) (December 1, 2019), which is available at www.lifewatch.org, contains the text of the outstanding presentation on the Church by Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker (retired). You will remember that Bp. Whitaker presented “The Gospel Truth about Christ’s Church for United Methodists” at First

United Methodist Church—in Wilson, NC—on November 15, 2019. Recall, also, that The Reverend Dr. J. Warren Smith, of Duke Divinity School, offered a thoughtful response to the good bishop’s fine presentation.

What follows proposes three additional comments on Bp. Whitaker’s presentation—first, on American Revivalism and Liberal Protestantism; second, on the Church’s culture; and third, on the doctrinal and disciplinary structure of the Church’s culture.

Revivalism and Liberalism

First, in his historical summary of Methodism in America, Bp. Whitaker touches on Methodist Revivalism and then moves into Methodist Liberal Protestantism. According to Whitaker, when Revivalism, during the Second Great Awakening (roughly 1790-1850), sweeps across America, the Methodist Movement in America jumps on Revivalism’s bandwagon, lets go of its original identity (which was dedicated to a faithful pursuit of holiness and to a more sacramental faith), and thereby grows in popularity. Evidently, the Methodists of that era become addicted to their increasing numbers. Decades later, when more Americans are going to school for longer periods of time, Methodists follow the theological fashion of that latter day: many (especially the elites) begin to resemble Liberal Protestants in their theological orientation so that they (and their church) can retain their cultural position and popularity. So, American Methodists demonstrate that their communal identity seems to be up for grabs: Methodists do whatever it takes to keep themselves acceptable to, and powerful in, the larger culture.

A couple of things might be noted in passing. First, these two schools of American theology—Revivalism and Liberal Protestantism—are still alive and well today in American Christianity and in The United Methodist Church. In contemporary United Methodism, they are exactly the camps that are locked in theological argument about sexual morals and much else. Second, and this is quite significant, both Revivalism and Liberal Protestantism are notably deficient in their teachings on the Church. Revivalism and Liberal Protestantism, more or less, propose to individuals how they should be Christian disciples. But Revivalism and Liberal Protestantism are not much help in guiding followers of Jesus Christ (i.e., Christians) into being the Body of Jesus Christ (i.e., the Church) in this world. So as the struggle between Revivalism and Liberal Protestantism continues today in The United Methodist Church, that same United Methodist Church has great difficulty maturing into the Church which is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic (Nicene Creed).

The Church Is a Culture

Second, Bp. Whitaker’s presentation—again, entitled “The Gospel Truth about Christ’s Church for United Methodists”—most certainly recalls the book *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, 1951) in the minds of some United Methodists. In this book, H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), a great Protestant theologian who taught for decades at Yale Divinity School, offers five models of being the Church in the modern world. In Niebuhr’s terms, those models (or types) can be listed as: “Church against culture,” “Church of

culture,” “Church above culture,” “Church and culture in paradox,” and “Church the transformer of culture.”

Dr. Robert Louis Wilken, the William R. Kenan Professor Emeritus of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia, notes that H. Richard Niebuhr fails in his Christ and Culture book to include the obvious: the Church is a culture! Again, the Church is a culture. That is, the Church has its own way of speaking and listening, thinking and doing, gathering and dispersing, remembering and visioning. As Bp. Whitaker makes thunderously clear in his essay, the Church does not make up itself, its faith and life, as it goes along. Instead, the Church always strives, first and foremost, to be faithful to God, to be “God’s own people” in its given time and place. So the Church reflects the Biblical Israel. The Church serves, trusts, and obeys the Word of God. The Church hears, trusts, and follows Jesus Christ. The Church lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because God lives, God’s people live. Again, God’s people do not live by their own devices and desires. The Church is a culture that is created and sustained by the grace, law, and power of God.

Doctrine and Discipline

And third, the Church’s culture is in large part structured by God-given doctrine and discipline. Note that St. Matthew’s Gospel mentions the word church in only two places: in Matthew 16 and in Matthew 18:17.

In Matthew 16, Simon Peter declares Jesus’ identity: “‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.’” (vv.16-18, emphasis added) Here Jesus is pointing to the doctrinal, or confessional, foundation of the Church that God (not humanity) reveals. Clearly, the Bible’s strong claim is that the Church receives from God, and does not create, its doctrine.

In Matthew 18, Jesus lays out a means or process of practicing discipline when a dispute arises in the Church: “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (vv. 15-17, emphases added) Here Jesus is giving His Church a disciplinary procedure to be followed after He has ascended into heaven. Here Jesus indicates that He believes that discipline will be essential in the day-to-day life of the Church.

These three comments show how very provocative Bp. Whitaker’s presentation is. It is an ecclesiological gift that keeps on giving. In a church filled with talk about a “Protocol” that promises United Methodists “Reconciliation and Grace through Separation” (that is, through schism), not wanting to “fight” any more, utopian visions of post-separation denominations, massive amounts of

denominational detailing, and comparisons of various General Conference 2020 plans and possible outcomes, Bp. Whitaker’s (and Dr. Warren Smith’s) dedication to maturing The United Methodist Church in faithfulness provides relief and hope. (Paul T. Stallsworth) ♥

BISHOP WILKE RESPONDS

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter [of December 5, 2019]. We must love, and we must love Jesus. And we must try to hold our beloved church together.

In addition, thank you for your interest in my point of view regarding homosexuality, the Bible, and the conflict in The United Methodist Church. [See “How Bishop Wilke Changed His Mind,” Lifewatch, December 1, 2019, pp. 1-3.] I also appreciate the opportunity to comment on your response to my interview.

For clarity, my understandings changed in the following way. The first was my initial acceptance of my daughter, which was driven by the Holy Spirit. For as Jesus said, what parent if his/her child asks for bread, gives a rock? My research into homosexuality, from Biblical and scientific understanding, took place over a number of years.

Some of the key questions I researched were:

- >When did a Bible start using the word “homosexual?”
- >How did the word “homosexual” replace words from the Greek and Hebrew that referred to rape, prostitution, and the sexual abuse of boys?
- >How, when, and why did the behavioral sciences come to change their understanding of homosexuality?
- >How was I to understand the violations of Hebrew law which were clearly undertaken by Jesus and his disciples?
- >Why do so many Christians, including myself, not follow so many Biblical laws now, and most folks find it acceptable?

And there is another reality for me. Why does this issue need to split the church?

As a bishop, I had churches that refused to have a woman pastor. I had pastors who refused to marry a bi-racial couple. I had churches that refused to have a pastor who had been divorced. I had pastors who refused to remarry a divorced person. I had laypersons who felt strongly that alcohol use and gambling were sins, and persons so indulging should be removed from the church. I had churches that were very focused on social justice and others on personal salvation.

Through all our differences we still worshiped together, prayed together, and conducted worldwide mission work as a denomination. That is still my prayer.

Yours,

[Bishop] Dick Wilke

Bp. Wilke’s reply is gracious and understandable. Evidently, the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” if adopted by General Conference 2020, would steer The United Methodist Church toward a separation (or split or schism), which would not be altogether acceptable to Bp. Wilke—and probably many others. (PTS) ♥

THE FAILURE OF THE BISHOPS

The time for forthrightness, for United Methodists, has arrived. The time for honestly acknowledging failure, for the sake of the church, is here.

The overarching questions are: How did The United Methodist Church end up in its current chaos? And why does the church seem unable to be delivered from it? The answer to both questions is this: the bishops of the church. Mainly the bishops of American Methodism. But all the bishops have played a role—some much more, some much less—in creating this denominational mess. Bishops have hesitated to teach the doctrine and to uphold the discipline that they were consecrated (and they vowed and they were charged by The Book of Discipline) to teach and uphold. Bishops have openly dissented from the church's established doctrine and discipline. And bishops have refused to discipline, by due process and/or by informal means, those bishops who publicly undermined church doctrine and/or violated church law.

Origins

The United Methodist Church was born in 1968. At the church's birth, the Sexual Revolution was gaining cultural strength—by winning over hearts, minds, and institutions—in the United States, throughout the West, and beyond. Not surprisingly, the new church's General Conferences, every four years, were challenged to debate matters related to human sexuality. That was made necessary by “pluralism,” which was written into its founding documents and elevated to a defining characteristic of the new denomination. Each and every one of The United Methodist Church's General Conferences deliberated and decided to keep the church's doctrine and discipline consistent with the Church's 2,000-year-old understanding of what the Bible teaches on marriage and sexuality.

During these decades of continuing debate on human sexuality, the bishops of The United Methodist Church—within the Council of Bishops, in their episcopal areas, and on the denominational stage—remained noticeably silent. That is, most bishops did not teach the Church's time-tested understanding of marriage and sexuality to United Methodist clergy and laity. When a few of the bishops did teach on sexuality, too often they taught a concoction of their own opinions that reflected societal fashion and undermined historic Christianity's sexual morals. So, when the subject of human sexuality arose, bishops most often either avoided the uncomfortable subject or dissented from the church's doctrine and discipline.

From its beginning, when it came to matters related to marriage and sexuality, The United Methodist Church lacked faithful shepherds. Clergy and laity “were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36, NRSV)

Disruptions

Then came two incidents that sent shock waves throughout The United Methodist Church. First, in 2013, Bishop Melvin G. Talbert (then retired), without permission from the resident bishop, traveled into Alabama and officiated at a same-sex service. And second, at the 2016

Western Jurisdictional Conference, Rev. Karen Oliveto—who does not hide her lesbian lifestyle—was elected bishop and appointed to the Mountain Sky Area.

After each of these events occurred, media attention and denominational frenzy followed. Attempting to formulate responses to these incidents, the Council of Bishops held lengthy discussions. Special groups of bishops called meetings. Jurisdictional bishops deliberated. Public statements were written and released. The church's Judicial Council became involved. Time passed.

What was the result of these bishops' blatant rebellions against the church's doctrine and discipline? Nothing much. Bp. Talbert remains a retired bishop in good standing in the church—presumably enjoying the benefits of his position. And Bp. Oliveto continues to lead her episcopal area. Despite the fact that, according to The Book of Discipline, The United Methodist Church maintains Biblically grounded doctrine and discipline on matters related to marriage and sexuality, Bp. Talbert and Bp. Oliveto engaged in ostentatious violations of that doctrine and discipline; and yet, they were not significantly held accountable, let alone reprimanded, for their violations. Evidently, the other bishops simply stood around and watched these train wrecks occur; then they did a lot of talking; now they do what they can to help the church move on and forget.

After the major incidents involving Bp. Talbert and Bp. Oliveto, some of the bishops went on to help develop and/or promote various plans and petitions that opposed the Traditional Plan. They aimed: to set aside standing church doctrine and church discipline; to move the denomination toward maximizing doctrinal and disciplinary choice for clergy and laity, congregations and annual conferences; and now to “separate” the present United Methodist Church into at least two denominations (according to the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Reconciliation” that was released on January 3). All of this was done under the banner of church unity, and later under the banner of what is best for United Methodists, their peace of mind, and their mission to the world. In addition, bishops tried repeatedly to have Traditional Plan petitions, many of which were adopted by the 2019 General Conference, declared unconstitutional by the Judicial Council. These multiple attempts were, more or less, unsuccessful. Again and again, the same reality was replaying: bishops were acting against their own church's standing doctrine and discipline.

Violation

This must be acknowledged: When United Methodists—laity or clergy, pastors or professors or bishops—violate the discipline (that is, break the laws of the church), they severely harm The United Methodist Church. While the media often cheer on such violations, such infractions actually undermine the faith of the people in the pews. They are especially problematic for those with faith in need of grounding and strengthening. These violations also tend to demoralize—literally de-moralize or take morality away from—the clergy so that they become less likely to teach faithfully the Christian truth about human sexuality. Furthermore, such violations divide the church into all kinds of factions that go on to struggle against each other for their

own protection and power. All in all, violations of the discipline have a deeply destabilizing effect on the denomination. They are destructive of the church. That is seldom admitted.

This is the bottom-line truth of the matter: Violations of church discipline, especially those that involve bishops and that are not justly resolved, violate the whole church.

Grace?

How could the bishops of the church become stuck in routine passivity toward, and regular dissent against, church doctrine? And in the avoidance of church discipline (especially the discipline of those bishops who have egregiously violated church law)?

It could be that the bishops carry a faulty theology. Their theology disables them from upholding church doctrine and discipline. Again, their day-to-day, operational theology might well prevent the bishops from speaking and acting in ways that propose church doctrine and uphold church discipline. Call theirs a theology of “cheap grace,” as Dietrich Bonhoeffer might.

In his *Cost of Discipleship* (1937, Macmillan Company’s 13th Printing, 1972), Bonhoeffer explains “cheap grace:” “Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks’ wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?” (p. 45)

Bonhoeffer gets even more pointed: “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” (p. 47) Bishops have degraded a theology of Wesleyan grace into a theology of cheap grace. They throw around the word grace as if merely saying it, and writing it, fixes everything in the church and the world.

This theology of cheap grace prevents bishops from being formed, and informed, by the truth, beauty, and goodness of historic Christianity’s teaching on marriage and sexuality. Also, this theology of cheap grace incapacitates the bishops from responding to the disciplinary challenges posed by their colleagues who routinely refuse to propose church doctrine and conspicuously violate church discipline. Furthermore and perhaps most devastatingly, as Bonhoeffer

“If bishops find their ways into two or three different, new denominations—that result from a separation of The United Methodist Church in the days to come—they will most likely carry their theology of cheap grace into the post-separation denominations.”

suggests above, the bishops’ adherence to cheap grace even blinds and deafens them to the living Headship of the risen Jesus Christ over His Church, including The United Methodist Church, and to His guidance, commandment, and law for His Church.

If the bishops are not challenged out of their theology of cheap grace, their doctrinal and disciplinary disability will continue. If bishops find their ways into two or three different, new denominations—that result from a

separation of The United Methodist Church in the days to come—they will most likely carry their theology of cheap grace into the post-separation denominations; so their doctrinal and disciplinary disability will spread into new places.

Why?

Why write and release this article, which could be described as a diatribe (or jeremiad), at this time? Does it accomplish any good? Six responses are in order.

First, in the Church, attempts to serve the Truth, and related truths, should always be initiated and encouraged. Such attempts should be launched even—especially—if they involve uncomfortable claims. In the Church, we strive to serve the Truth. In the Church, service of the Truth is more important than a silence with smiles and winks. This article is an attempt—a flawed attempt, to be sure—to serve the Truth.

Second, United Methodists tend to be obsequious—or sheepish—around bishops. We have a tendency to stand in awe of them and to avoid critiquing their ministries. However, when bishops mislead, their leadership should be criticized—even as their humanity is acknowledged, baptism remembered, and office respected. Again, this article is an attempt to critique, for the sake of transforming, the ministry of the bishops.

Third, there is a potential for informal discipline resulting from this article. United Methodist bishops have not held each other accountable to the church’s doctrine and discipline. The reason often given for this sad state of affairs is that The Book of Discipline, as presently written, does not set forth due processes that would allow this accountability to occur. Well, if the bishops can not and will not discipline themselves, could clergy and laity across The United Methodist Church rise up and demand, through thoughtful public pressure, that bishops start ordering their ministries to conform with the decided will of General Conference?

Fourth, the well intentioned “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation” created a stir in The United Methodist Church and in American society. Knowing that half of the Protocol’s sixteen signatories are bishops, and that bishops are behind the present denominational chaos, might increase the willingness of clergy and laity to consider the Protocol critically—not support it automatically.

Fifth, repentance. If one bishop would publicly repent, others would follow; and the whole church might join in. Reconciliation through repentance would be glorious; reconciliation through separation, inglorious.

And sixth, an article that charges bishops with misleading a church just might encourage laity and clergy of that church to look to Jesus Christ and His leading. This is the strongest reason for publishing this article here and now. As the third section of The Barmen Declaration of 1934 boldly states: “As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his [Christ’s] property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.”

According to Barmen, the Church is Christ’s to have and to lead—not the bishops’ to grasp and to manage. A return to Christ, even by bishops, is possible. “For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls” (I Peter 2:25, NRSV). (Paul T. Stallworth) ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Thank you for your generosity in supporting Lifewatch’s witness for the Gospel of Life in The United Methodist Church (and beyond). Your financial gifts to Lifewatch can still be offered in three ways. First, write a check to “Lifewatch” and send it to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/ Cottleville, MO 63338. Second, give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. And third, if you are over the age of 72, give a gift from your IRA as a tax-free distribution. (This means a gift [up to \$100,000!] can be transferred from your IRA directly to Lifewatch and will count toward your minimum required distribution without being considered as taxable income.) If you are considering an IRA gift, please first speak with, or write to, Mrs. Evans in the Lifewatch office. During the present uncertainty in The United Methodist Church, Mrs. Evans and I are so deeply grateful for you, for your encouraging prayers, and for your supportive dollars. (PTS)
- Last Spring, the Alabama House passed a bill, by a vote of 74-3, that would protect unborn children from abortion. African-American, State Representative John Rogers responded in a morally disturbing way: “Some kids are unwanted. You bring them in the world unwanted, unloved; you send them to the electric chair. So, you kill them now or you kill them later.” Evidently, Rep. Rogers prefers death by abortion to death by the electric chair. (Less expensive

for all concerned?) Unfortunately, he is simply reflecting ideas that are usually thought but not spoken—for good reason.

Bradley Mattes writes: “Documented evidence shows that abortion is a significant issue in the black community. According to government statistics from the US Census Bureau and the Centers for Disease Control, blacks comprise only 13.4% of the population, yet black women account for 36% of all abortions done.

“In the midst of his ranting and raving, Rogers understands something’s amiss, saying, ‘There’s a move afoot to put more whites on this earth.’ What Rep. Rogers doesn’t understand, or refuses to believe, is it’s happening right under his nose.

“Research shows that 78% of Planned parenthood abortion facilities are within walking distance of high populations of women of color. This clandestine effort to ‘whiten’ America is being carried out by the abortion industry that he loyally supports.

“Tragically, a high percentage of black elected officials like John Rogers are aiding and abetting Planned Parenthood’s eugenics agenda against their own constituencies.” (www.lifeissues.org/2019/05/john-rogers-only-tip-of-the-iceberg/)

O faithful readers of Lifewatch, let us encourage one another, and others, to live in the truth and in love.

- At a recent National Pro-life Religious Council (NPRC) meeting, Father Frank Pavone, of Priests for Life, mentioned one of those memorable incidents. When the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred on the World Trade Center in New York City, near Shanksville, PA, and on the Pentagon, just under 3,000 people died (including the terrorists). The National September 11 Memorial names, in bronze, those who died in the 2001 terrorist attacks and those who died in the 1993 attack. During the NPRC meeting, Fr. Pavone mentioned that 11 unborn children are listed.

When New York State passed the Reproductive Health Act, an extremely (and probably extremist) pro-choice (actually pro-abortion) bill, last January, Governor Andrew Cuomo had the One World Trade Center lit in pink to celebrate the passage of the pro-choice bill. Nearby, the National September 11 memorial commemorated 11 unborn children through their names etched in bronze.

This illustrates a sad truth in American society. In the United States today, some recognize the humanity of the unborn child. Some do not. Unfortunately, that is where we Americans are: divided on abortion. And unfortunately, hundreds of thousands—indeed, millions—of unborn children continue to die. Thousands die each day. Day after

SEND LIFEWATCH TO A FRIEND!

Extend your outreach—and ours—with a free subscription to a friend. Simply provide the information requested below. Also, your contributions—however large or small—will help advance the ministry of Lifewatch by inspiring United Methodists to love both the unborn child and mother. Thank you for caring enough to act.

Name: _____

Street: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Please mail to: Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville MO 63338.

Lifewatch is published by the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization.



Lifewatch
Taskforce of
United Methodists on
Abortion and Sexuality

P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338

03/01/20

- * Dr. David Watson preaches:
"A Prayer for a Forgetful People"
- * The Bishops Fail
- * Bishop Wilke Responds

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lancaster PA
Permit No. 507

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

day. Week after week. Month after month. Year after year. They die.

- Many Americans are reeling from the news that deceased abortionist George Klopfer stockpiled 2,246 bodies of his aborted victims in his Illinois home. The White House called for an investigation and the Attorneys General in both Illinois and Indiana announced they will launch a probe.

"If abortion advocates claim this abortionist is just an outlier of legal abortion, don't believe them. [Remember Kermit Gosnell in Philadelphia, Steven Chase Brigham and Vikram Kaji in NJ, Douglas Karpen in TX, and Allan Zarkin in NY.]

"Klopfer lost his medical license in 2015 for providing substandard abortions and failure to report the rape of a thirteen-year-old." (Bradley Mattes, "They're Not Outliers. They're the Face of Legal Abortion," Life Issues, www.lifeissues.org, September 19, 2019)

Many stories about abortion in America today depict abortion as dangerous, illicit, and common—not "safe, legal, and rare," as we were once promised.

- Last Easter Season, our town's local Roman Catholic priest, who is a good friend, sent a thoughtful email. It contained a black-and-white silhouette of a hill with three crucifixions near its summit. In bold font, this declaration appeared beneath the crucifixions: "JESUS IS LORD' IS NOT MY PERSONAL OPINION. IT IS TO MAKE A DETERMINATIVE POLITICAL CLAIM." And who is quoted? None other than Dr. Stanley Hauerwas, the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law at Duke University. Once again, in a world with so much

avoidance, compromise, and gray, Hauerwas serves clarifying truth. He often does. Thanks be to God.

- Your friendly scribe recently attended a meeting of the clergy of our district with our bishop. After the bishop's presentation came a time for questions and comments from the clergy. One pastor stood and identified as a "moderate." Well, your scribe was surprised to learn that there really was one moderate (or "centrist") left in The United Methodist Church. After all, the 2019 General Conference seemed to create a veritable stampede of moderates/centrists toward the progressive side. That stampede continued through most of the 2019 Annual Conferences in the United States and especially in their elections of delegates to the 2020 General Conference. To find one who was willing to claim, at this late date, that he had resisted the stampede was surprising. Perhaps this self-identified moderate should be placed in a United Methodist museum, secured behind iron bars (or very thick windows), and visited, gazed at, and studied by paying customers.

- *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* "Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail." ♥

Lifewatch Advisory Board

Rev. Paul R. Crikelair
Pastor, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania

Mrs. Cindy Evans
Administrator/Outreach Coordinator
Cottleville, Missouri

Dr. Michael J. Gorman
Ecumenical Institute of Theology
Baltimore, Maryland

Dr. Stanley Hauerwas
Duke University

Ms. Myrna Howard
Alva, Florida

Rev. Bill Hughes
Blessed Earth

Rev. Edward H. Johnson
Pastor, Sandston, Virginia

Rev. Harold D. Lewis (ret.)
Florida Conference

Mr. John Lomperis
Chicago, Illinois

Mr. Donald T. Siress
Treasurer
O'Fallon, Missouri

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth
President, [Lifewatch](http://Lifewatch.org) Editor
Pastor, Whiteville, North Carolina

Don and Carla Thompson
Whiteville, Tennessee

Rev. Mrs. Pat B. Tony
Pastor, Manassas, Virginia

Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright
Duke University

Bp. Timothy W. Whitaker (ret.)
Keller, Virginia

†

Dr. Thomas C. Oden
(1931-2016)

Dr. John E. Juergensmeyer
(1934-2014)

Bishop William R. Cannon
(1916-1997)

Dr. Albert C. Outler
(1908-1989)

Titles and affiliations are for identification purposes only.

LETTERS/COMMENTS TO THE EDITOR:

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, [Lifewatch](http://Lifewatch.org) Editor
902 Pinckney Street, Whiteville, NC 28472
910.642.3376 / paulstallsworth@nccumc.org

HAVE YOU MOVED?

If so, please contact Ms. Cindy Evans
to change your mailing address.
636.294.2344 / lifewatch@charter.net
Thank you!

VISIT US AT: www.lifewatch.org
and on Facebook by searching for: **lifewatch-taskforce**