

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS: A SERVANT OF TRUTH

by Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth

On January 8, 2009, Father Richard John Neuhaus, 72, died in New York City. Father Neuhaus was a great man. Some claim he was the most significant theologian, in and for American public life, since Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971).

This United Methodist pastor had the extraordinary opportunity to work with Richard Neuhaus from 1984 until 1990 in New York—first at The Center on Religion and Society, and then at The Institute on Religion and Public Life. During those years, it became clear to this associate that Richard Neuhaus was a great man because he followed the truth. In his preaching and in his pastoral work, in his speaking and in his writing, he served the truth.

For Richard John Neuhaus, the truth was first and foremost embodied in Jesus Christ and His Church. For decades, Neuhaus was a Lutheran pastor strongly committed to Word and Sacrament ministry. For many years, he pastored the Lutheran Church of St. John the Evangelist, an ethnic-minority congregation in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, NY. In 1991, ordained at the hands of John Cardinal O'Connor of the Archdiocese of New York, he became a Roman Catholic priest. During the last years of his life, Neuhaus, maintaining a Lutheran boldness in preaching and a Catholic commitment to the centrality of the Eucharist, celebrated the Mass daily at the Church of the Immaculate Conception on East 14th Street. The truth spoken and enacted, Word and Sacrament, formed the foundation of the life and ministry of Richard Neuhaus.

A servant of the truth of the Church's faith, Father Neuhaus was all about making and maturing ecclesiastical Christians. As such, he was a constant and severe critic of "the American religion" (Harold Bloom), which is the experiential religion of the self, and the philosophy of "the sovereign self" (Neuhaus), which is the secular counterpart of the religion of the self. Neuhaus believed that life in Christ (and His Church) and life in society, ideally and empirically, have to do with webs of relationships and communities, not isolation and privacy. For him, this was a matter of truth, not preference.

Richard Neuhaus recognized that truth brings unity, and that Christian unity is essential to Christian faith. He excelled at bringing Christians, all different kinds of Christians, to the table, as is said these days. Over twenty years ago, he invited leaders of Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and leaders of Mainline Protestantism's National Council of Churches to engage one another, in conferences, on matters related to Church and society.

United Methodists and people who teach at United Methodist schools, thankfully, were often involved in such Neuhaus projects. For example, Professor Stanley Hauerwas of Duke and Professor Thomas Oden of Drew were frequent participants. In addition, Neuhaus hosted a theological seminar called The Ramsey Colloquium, which was named after Professor Paul Ramsey, a United Methodist, of Princeton.

He also initiated Evangelicals and Catholics Together to put leading Evangelical Protestants and leading Roman Catholics in theological conversation with each other. Furthermore, he was committed to serious Christian-Jewish dialogue that encompassed theological, cultural, and political claims. Anchored in the truth, he extended friendship and engagement to the unexpected.

American public life was also Neuhaus' concern. Much of his ministry was spent attempting to push back "the naked public square" (as he called it), which aims at eliminating moral content and religious reference from public life. In the early 1970s, Neuhaus paid a high personal price, as many of his friends and colleagues bid him farewell, for recognizing that the moral foundation of the Civil Rights Movement also undergirded the Pro-Life Movement. Over the next 35 years, he became the most articulate spokesman, in American society, for the truth of the dignity of the human person.

It should be noted that Richard Neuhaus knew how to enjoy a good meal, a good drink (or two or three), and a good cigar. His conversation on such occasions was filled with jokes, joshing, and uncommon flashes of insight, which often undermined the conventional wisdom of the day.

Now Richard John Neuhaus, this great man, is gone. He has crossed the Jordan, as he would say. But he has left behind much for present and future use. First Things—an influential, monthly journal on religion and

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public life, of which he was the editor in chief for 150 issues—will continue publication. An ecumenical, interreligious community of discourse, formed around First Things, will certainly expand. Projects such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together, regular table talks with theologians, and occasional scholars conferences will most probably persist. And the paper trail he leaves, which is miles and miles long, will remain open to investigation. His nearly thirty books and countless essays might well be read and engaged by more now than when he was alive. For years to come, Neuhaus will be quoted on matters related to theology and public life, and his legacy will be evidenced within the public witness of the various churches. (Lifewatch, for example, has taken, now takes, and will continue to take Neuhaus and his ministry to be a leading light.)

If and as all that occurs, Richard John Neuhaus will have been a servant of truth in life and in the life beyond death.

A version of the above article appears in the March/April 2009 issue of Good News. ♥

2009 LIFEWATCH SERMON: “GOD’S MISCHIEF”

by Dr. Amy Laura Hall

I Samuel 3:1-10

“And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.” (I Samuel 3:1b, RSV, here and following) These brief sentences sum up so much of what is happening in today’s sermon text.

Samuel’s own mother sits weeping and praying for a child. Weeping and praying for a child. Yet Eli, unable to see what he is seeing, tells her to get off the booze. He tells her that she needs to stop drinking. And yet, here she is, weeping, weeping for a child. And she gets what she yearns for.

The word of the Lord is rare. Visions are not widespread. This little story of Samuel’s calling comes at the beginning of a succession narrative. It is an account of God’s people yearning, yearning for a leader, yearning for a judge who will help them, help them decide disputes, help them avoid violence toward one another and toward the most vulnerable.

This succession narrative leads to the very one, eventually, whose Psalm [139] we prayed earlier in this worship service. This succession narrative leaves us wondering: will this Samuel, will this promised child, will this boy, be the one to secure the peace of Israel?

We have Eli. He can see, but he is not attentive. He cannot clearly see the pain of one of his own, who is sitting and weeping and praying. He is unable to see the pain before him, or he sees her pain as vice. Questions I have to ask are, What if she had been an alcoholic sitting in his midst? If she had been drunk, would those have been the words for him to say to her?



Dr. Amy Laura Hall

But he cannot even see that she is in pain. Visions are not widespread

DANGER

Now if we opened up the Bible and looked at the placement of I Samuel, we find it is located in a section of Scripture that is narratively ridden with danger. There is hope, and there is danger, in Israel’s story. The end of The Book of Judges is a section of Scripture that is unparalleled in its disastrous tragedy. It is here, at the end of The Book of Judges, that we have the refrain, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.” (21:25)

There is the story of a concubine, one who was in an in-between state—truly not a wife, and absolutely not a prostitute. She could be treated as either by the one who almost owned her. She is left for dead, thrown out, thrown out to those who would have their way with her. In those days there is no king in the land. In those days visions are rare. And we are left with the story that not only is she violated, but also the one who was to be her protector dismembers her, and he uses her as some sort of macabre sign of how Israel had become dismembered. And we are left, at the end of The Book of Judges, yearning for a king, yearning for one who will be able to have visions. The very last line, at the end of The Book of Judges, is this refrain: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.”

But we do not receive a king yet. In this interim space, between The Book of Judges and the calling of the boy Samuel, is the little story of a woman who could have been treated like the concubine. It is a little story of Ruth and Naomi, traveling through the very land that had proven not just inhospitable, but violating. They are traveling through that land, towards Bethlehem, towards the place of food, towards the place of bread, the very

place from which the concubine had come. They get there safely. All we are told is that Ruth becomes King David's great, great, great, great grandmother. We are left without a solid, clear, definitive kingdom in which the concubine will no longer be dismembered, in which the most vulnerable will no longer be violated. We are left without resolution.

Reading through I Samuel and II Samuel, and I Kings and II Kings, the first time, I discovered that these texts claim that good kings go bad, good judges go awry, and the sons of a good judge tend to go horribly wrong. That is where we are, this morning, in the story of Israel. Eli's sons are not fit to take over his realm. And if we keep reading, neither are Samuel's. Samuel—who is called by the Lord, and who has vision when Eli does not—still is not able to give us a kingdom in which there will be definitive peace and safety.

WHERE IS HOPE?

So, where is the hope, in this part of the narrative, for the people of Israel? And is there any hope in this story for those of us, a mere scrap of the Body of Christ, gathered here?

I think so.

I want to risk saying something about this week. I have very beloved friends who are very clear that they think the apocalypse has started. Also, I have very beloved friends who believe that the kingdom is coming. Now I am pretty sure that Barack Obama is not the anti-Christ, and I am pretty sure that he is not the Savior. So let me try to think, with you, about what visions we might have—what visions we might have when it seems there is scarcity, when there may not be enough to go around; what visions we might have when the Body of Christ is ridden with division; what visions we might have when we, as the Body of Christ, are threatened at many turns with dismemberment.

I am going to tell you about two trips that I have taken that gave me hope. They are not definitive stories. Because of them, no kingdom is established. But they provided scraps of hope that came to me as blessings.

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

The first one involves going, the week before the elections, to Focus on the Family. Now if you know anything about Duke University, you know that there are people at Duke who, if they found out that I had walked through the door of Focus on the Family, would no longer be on speaking terms with me. That is, they would no longer greet me in the hallway. Nevertheless, someone from Focus on the Family called, and asked if I would come and, believe it or not, talk to their leadership about what they do wrong. The caller explained, "You wrote this book about Mainline Protestantism and the way that the ideal of the family, as put forward by Mainline Protestantism, has been death-dealing for those who do not fit the model, the ideal, the cover of Together magazine of the 1950s.

What would you have written, if you had written about Focus on the Family?"

Well, I thought, okay, I will go. I told them I would bring my younger daughter, and I went. I was not expecting them to want to hear what I would have to say. Nor was I expecting to find there the kind of blessing I found.

We arrived at Focus on the Family. My little one, who is just starting to read, asked me, "Mommy, what does Nobama mean?" Those stickers were everywhere. The parking lot was full of that bumpersticker. Before then, I had not seen one. I live in Durham, NC, which went 76% for Obama in the election. So I had not seen one. In Durham, no one, I guess, was daring enough to put that bumpersticker on his or her car.

What I discovered there that was most hopeful—and there was much going on—is that Focus on the Family was open to the critique that they had, for decades, encouraged an ideal of the family that has made foster care and adoption seem virtually absurd, foolish in a way that Christians should not risk. They are realizing that over the years, by giving a particular kind of advice to families for making the family more seemly and Christian in an outward way, they may have given the impression that families cannot risk the danger of bringing in children who are overtly wounded. Such children, many of whom are in the foster-care system, have been dismembered by violence in their own homes and are struggling with the trauma of their abuse. How could any responsible adult take on such a task?

And so Focus on the Family, in a big part of their sanctity-of-life division, is putting out materials to encourage congregations to think differently about families, to think of the congregation with the primary vocation of helping families cope. Rather than focusing on the nuclear family, Focus on the Family is working hard to ask Anglo congregations to wade in the water, to get into the water that God has troubled.

We cannot sing that hymn, "Wade in the Water," in white congregations without getting troubled. Part of what they—and mostly women were working on this project—are talking about is how congregations can support a family willing to get into those troubled waters and bring into its midst a child who may never be healed. They have a little book about a town. Have you heard of Possum Trot, TX? The hope at Focus on the Family's sanctity-of-life foster care is about a little town called Possum Trot, a town of about 600. It is a town in which one congregation, an African-American congregation, has adopted out of the foster care system over 80 children over the last twelve years. That is an extraordinary number.

***Please remember to pray and fast
for the ministry of Lifewatch the first Tuesday
of every month.***

The story is not one of successes from tragedy to definitive hope. These children are not going off to college. Most of them are still struggling. There have been suicides. There have been incarcerations, right there in Possum Trot. But the congregation and the adoptive families have been willing to get into those troubled waters. They have been willing to wade in the water. And I have to tell you that I find that an extraordinary sign of hope. If Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church in Durham, NC, or Trinity United Methodist Church in Durham or any of your congregations that stand as models of respectability is willing to wade in the water enough to bring into their lives those who are considered to be irredeemable by most medical professionals and to be with them in their suffering—that, also, is an extraordinary sign of hope.

PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS

Also, I want to tell you about my trip to Washington, DC. The reason we were in DC earlier this week is that my older daughter, who is here this morning, spent a whole lot of time writing letters to women who had never voted. My younger daughter and I spent a lot of time going to neighborhoods where people had never voted, and we asked them to vote.

I realized very early on in this process that something was going to be different this time around. I have neighbors who, if I carry a Bible into their home, are going to continue to suspect me of being up to no good. But yet, campaigning for Obama opened up conversations for me that the cross did not. I have to say, this was a time of both joy and lament, because I thought, Should not the cross have been enough for us to have sat down and had an honest conversation about what is going on in our neighborhood with drugs and violence and under-funded schools and struggles with children going to jail?

But yet, in the midst of this, we had conversations over a little voter-registration pad. I do not know what to make of that, folks. I had the occasion of celebrating with a man who had just finished all of his jail time, all of his time having to report in during probation. He was going to get to vote for the first time, because he had been incarcerated since his teens. And he celebrated getting to vote in a way that I had not seen many people celebrate getting to come to the Lord's Supper. I am not sure what to make of that. It is either a sign of lament or a possible sign of hope.

When I think about how we came to this week, I have to tell you that one of the things that strikes me is that not only our churches shaped the way my generation thinks but also Bill Cosby did. If the most segregated hour of the week is on Sunday morning between 11:00 and 12:00, then the most desegregated hour was when the Bill Cosby show ran on television. People had Bill Cosby and his family in their living rooms when they did not even know their African-American neighbors across the tracks. I do not know what to make of this.

But maybe I find that, if Bill Cosby can help desegregate the United States by way of television, and Focus on the Family is trying to desegregate by adopting children out of the foster care system, I think there is the possibility that God may be up to some holy mischief. There is a possibility that God may be up to some holy mischief, even here, even at this time, when there are some of you who believe that hope is lost. I think there is a possibility that there is hope even for that cause which unites us here in this place: the possibility that each and every life will be esteemed and beloved because of the One who makes all of us.

OUR HOPE

I think there are many people here in DC who are hoping that Barack Obama will give us expiation for the country's sin. Many of them are on the left politically. I watched them on the Metro train, the white people who were hoping to find a black person to talk to. We were all on the train together. Most of the African-American folks I saw encountering this were very gracious and listened to us tell our stories of canvassing to prove that we really did earn our way in.

But this man is not our expiation. He is not our Savior. He is just our President. There is One who brings change. There is One who changed everything. There is One who is giving us vision. There is One who is giving us hope.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dr. Hall teaches theological ethics at The Divinity School of Duke University in Durham, NC. This sermon was preached on January 22, 2009 at Simpson Memorial Chapel in The United Methodist Building, Washington, DC.

A special word of thanks to Rebekah Sharpe, of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, for helping to prepare this sermon manuscript for publication.♥

<p>SOME NUMBERS, SOME WORDS, SOME SILENCE 2005: Year of the most recent annual data on abortion in America (from the Guttmacher Institute) 1,200,000: Total number of abortions in America, 2005 50,000,000: Estimated total number of abortions in America, 1973-2008 47%: Percentage of repeat abortions (at least one previous abortion), 2004 Old Testament: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9, RSV) New Testament: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40, RSV) Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker on abortion: "What I feel is revulsion at the moral horror that is abortion. This revulsion is magnified when I reflect upon the fact, as Carl Braaten has said, '99% of all murders in the United States are abortions.'" ("Do No Harm!") United Methodist Council of Bishops on abortion:</p>
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A LETTER TO PRESIDENT OBAMA

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
Washington, DC 20500
20 January 2009
Dear Mr. President:

In behalf of Lifewatch (or the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality), I want to express respect for the campaigns you waged, for the transition you are overseeing, and for the new administration you are forming. Many of your political aspirations and goals, that you have declared to the American people, are indeed honorable and hopeful. According to Biblical and ecclesiastical practice, the Lifewatch community, including this pastor, will pray for you, your family, and your administration in the years to come.

Lifewatch is a ministry that is dedicated to serving the Gospel of Life in The United Methodist Church and the Culture of Life in American society. Our ministry witnesses to the dignity of the human person in the Church and in the society.

For that reason, Lifewatch would like to put before you The United Methodist Church's official teaching on abortion. Located in United Methodism's Book of Discipline (2008), it declares: "[Paragraph 161J] *Abortion*—The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether new individuals will be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion.

"But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child.

"We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures. We support parental, guardian, or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection.

"We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life. Before providing their services, abortion providers should be required to offer women the option of anesthesia.

"We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful

You are invited!

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY: AN ECUMENICAL INTRODUCTION TO JOHN PAUL II'S TEACHING

Three Lectures with Extended Q/A

Dr. Paul J. Griffiths
Warren Professor of Catholic Theology
Duke University Divinity School

Sheraton/Hilton Hotel and Marina
New Bern, NC
May 21, 2009
Ascension of the Lord (Thursday)
9:30 a.m.— 5:00 p.m.

To Register

Complete the brief form contained in the Theology of the Body brochure, which can be downloaded and printed from the Lifewatch home page (www.lifewatch.org). Then mail the registration form, with a \$30.00 check made payable to St. Peter's United Methodist Church, to: St. Peter's UMC, 111 Hodges Street, Morehead City, NC 28557. Call (252)726-2175 for more information.

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inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may cause them to consider abortion.

"The Church shall offer ministries to reduce unintended pregnancies. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth.

"We particularly encourage the Church, the government, and social service agencies to support and facilitate the option of adoption. (See Paragraph 161L.) We affirm and encourage the Church to assist the ministry of crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers that compassionately help women find feasible alternatives to abortion.

"Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, family, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel." (pp. 105-106)

With this official United Methodist teaching in mind, Lifewatch encourages you and your administration not to advance a political agenda that would extend abortion rights and accessibility. Such an agenda would undermine the societal unity toward which you have adamantly vowed to work. Such an agenda would be inconsistent with the highest ideals

embedded in the American experiment in ordered liberty. Such an agenda would contradict the teachings of historic Christianity and most churches in American society. Such an agenda would cause Lifewatch, and many other ministries and churches dedicated to the dignity of the human person, to rise up in determined dissent.

Again, Lifewatch wishes you and your new administration the best; and we will pray for you and yours. At the same time, we hope and pray that your politics, public policies, and governmental aims will serve the dignity with which all persons are endowed by their Creator.

Very respectfully yours,
(The Rev.) Paul T. Stallsworth
Pastor, and President of Lifewatch ♥

LIVING IN THE TRUTH: CHURCH AND SOCIETY, OBAMA, AND ABORTION

The Religious Advocates Working Group (RAWG), according to a 12/09/08 e-mail to this editor from Ms. Linda Bales of the General Board of Church and Society, is “a loosely knit coalition of staffers from faith-based organizations [which] address reproductive health issues legislatively.” Near the end of 2008, RAWG sent a letter to President-elect Obama “regarding reproductive health concerns”—to be specific, “access to comprehensive sex education,” “access to abortion services,” and “access to contraceptive information and options.” The letter included the “United Methodist Church, General Board of Church & Society” (as well as the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice) among its signatories.

The 12/09/08 e-mail from Ms. Bales notes: “Two weeks or so ago, I re-read [the] letter [from RAWG to President-elect Obama] and feel there is solid support through our *Social Principles* and *Book of Resolutions* for all the recommendations and statements made *except* for one—support for [the] Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), a piece of legislation originally introduced in the Congress in 2004 [that] has been re-introduced each session since then. The intent of FOCA is to codify the provisions guaranteed by *Roe v. Wade* which would, in application, legalize abortion through a federal law. If FOCA were adopted, it would overturn all existing abortion laws at federal, state and local levels of government that serve to limit a woman’s right to seek an abortion.” Here, Ms. Bales is honestly indicating the indisputably uncompromising, pro-choice intent of FOCA.

But then her e-mail reports some re-thinking: “After further examination of the ramifications of this bill, and considering the most recent statement on abortion approved at our 2008 General Conference,

GBCS [General Board of Church and Society] can no longer support this bill due to language stating support for parental, guardian or trusted adult notification for minors seeking abortions. Some states have parental notification laws, which would be overturned if FOCA was passed.”

Therefore, she writes, “[a] second letter has been sent to President-elect Obama...stating our [GBCS’s] need to withdraw our [GBCS’s] support for FOCA, and I wanted you to let you know of the action.” Ms. Bales’ letter to President-elect Obama was dated December 1, 2008, and it contained language similar to the 12/09/08 e-mail that I had received from her.

The General Board of Church and Society’s withdrawal of support for the Freedom of Choice Act is very good news. It shows intellectual honesty on the part of Ms. Linda Bales and GBCS. After all, any fair reading of *The Book of Discipline*’s Paragraph 161J, on abortion, would confirm that The United Methodist Church stands against FOCA and its unqualified pro-choice, legislative intent.

Again, Lifewatch commends Ms. Bales and the general-church agency she serves for exercising intellectual honesty. (Paul T. Stallsworth) ♥

DOWN SYNDROME ABORTIONS AND A RENEWED DEBATE

by Rev. Harley Wheeler

The practice of terminating a pregnancy (or abortion), after diagnosis of a genetic abnormality, just might change the nature of the abortion debate in The United Methodist Church.

It has become commonplace for parents, who are told that their unborn child (after genetic testing) will be born with Down syndrome, to end the pregnancy by abortion. While these are sometimes the most conflicted of abortions, with parents protesting that they wanted this child, the high rate of abortion for such children raises serious ethical concerns.

No one knows exactly how many children are aborted because of a Trisomy 21 (Down syndrome) diagnosis through genetic screening, because no records are kept on this data by abortion clinics. However, an *Obstetrics and Gynecology* article in 2000, “Cost-Benefit Analysis of Prenatal Diagnosis for Down Syndrome,” used an estimate that 90% of parents who receive this diagnosis in the first or second trimester of pregnancy will choose abortion. This study also estimated that more prevalent genetic testing would result in annual savings to society of \$95 million because of the reduced cost of caring for fewer children born with Down syndrome.

POSITIONS TAKEN, QUESTIONS RAISED

Mass terminations of Down syndrome children raise new questions in the abortion debate, because these children are not now doomed to a short, pain-filled life. People with Down syndrome are indeed subject to disabilities, but they can also become functioning, happy

members of society. As United Methodists, we should remember that we have a long history of ministry with persons with such disabilities.

I am pro-life. I believe that abortions should be legal only in the case of a clear threat to the life of the mother. Most United Methodists, most of the time, would deplore abortion for the reason of mere convenience. Furthermore, The Book of Discipline rejects abortion for reasons of birth control and sex selection.

But the compassionate pro-choice argument voiced in our denomination today states that government intrusion (by protecting the life of the unborn child) would do vast harm by interfering with the woman's decision, aided by the doctor's input, about what constitutes "tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion" (Paragraph 161J, The Book of Discipline). Again, the Discipline supports the legal protection of the individual's choice in "tragic conflicts of life with life." This legal protection grants complete freedom to the mother to decide the fate of her unborn child. Underlying this moral calculus is the assumption that the mother can be trusted to act reasonably and morally when weighing risks to her own life versus the life of her child.

I submit that once a diagnosis of an abnormality such as Down syndrome is made, it is no longer reasonable to assume that a decision to terminate the pregnancy is based on concern for the mother's life. Rather, it is reasonable to believe that the decision is being made to dispose of the child because of the perceived future burden that the child presents to the parents and to society. Again, once the evidence exists

that a child is to be born with a disability of this nature, the parents' decision to seek an abortion is more likely than not a decision for an abortion of convenience.

A CALL FOR DEBATE

We have not had a debate in The United Methodist Church about whether persons with disabilities are too much trouble to bear, birth, and raise. But we should! For the legal, mass destruction of human life for eugenic purposes has already begun.

Pro-life convictions commit this pastor to believe that anything less than robust, legal protections for unborn children provide people with a license to kill without fear of punishment. Societies pass laws against murder because they believe that some human beings will not count the lives of others as having a standing equal to their own convenience, prospects for the future, and emotional well being.

I challenge those who hold the pro-choice position to enter this debate and justify the continued selective killing of Down syndrome children. This debate is long overdue for three reasons. First, because eugenics is here already. Decisions are now being arbitrarily made about who is, and who is not, fit to live in today's society. Second, at best, our church might find a common voice in opposition to eugenic abortions; at least, the moral arguments of each side would be revealed. And third, the resulting discussion would be key to uncovering the support systems that our church can provide to those who discover that the children they bear have Down syndrome.

Rev. Wheeler is the pastor of Thompson United Methodist Church/P.O. Box 68/ Thompson, OH 44086/ (440)-298-1431/wheeler8@alltel.net.♥

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Lifewatch
Taskforce of
United Methodists on
Abortion and Sexuality

P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338

03/01/09

- * Dr. Amy Laura Hall on "God's Mischief"
- * GBCS tells Obama "No" on FOCA
- * Richard John Neuhaus remembered

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YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

● As a footnote to Rev. Wheeler's article above, stand informed that, on October 8, 2008, the Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act was signed into federal law. "The bill...calls for the establishment of a national registry for parents who want to adopt babies with conditions such as Down syndrome, spina bifida, or cystic fibrosis, according to the Associated Press. Current registries are small and are not known to most parents who receive such diagnoses." In response, Sen. Sam Brownback said, "This is a great victory for the culture of life we should all seek to promote. Currently, 90% of children prenatally diagnosed with Down syndrome are aborted. That number is much too high and suggests that we as a society are not doing everything we can to protect every human life, at every stage." (National Right to Life News, November/December 2008, p. 6)

● Please send a gift to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/ Cottleville, MO 63338. You are also invited to give to Lifewatch through PayPal on our homepage at www.lifewatch.org. Also, you can support Lifewatch's mission and ministry by donating stocks (since we recently opened a "DTC Brokerage Account"). For more information, please contact Cindy Evans at the Lifewatch office.

● If you will be moving in the near future, please notify the Lifewatch office for seamless delivery. Also, if you would rather receive Lifewatch by email than by snail mail, please make your wish known to Mrs. Cindy

Our Mission:

Out of obedience to Jesus Christ, the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS) "will work to create in church and society esteem for human life at its most vulnerable, specifically for the unborn child and for the woman who contemplates abortion." Therefore, TUMAS's first goal is "to win the hearts and minds of United Methodists, to engage in abortion-prevention through theological, pastoral, and social emphases that support human life."

Evans. You can email her at lifewatch@charter.net. Thank you.

● If you have a Gospel-of-Life testimony that might help to change hearts and minds, please send a 250-500 word version of it to Mrs. Cindy Evans at lifewatch@charter.net. It can be related to abortion, adoption, abstinence, embryonic stem cell research, homosexuality, or another life-related topic. Lifewatch would be privileged to work with you so that your story might be told—so that others might learn more deeply and truly of God's love, loyalty, and law.

● The Lifewatch Board Meeting of January 22, 2009 voted to add John Lomperis, a student at Harvard Divinity School, to Lifewatch's Advisory Board. John is now the youngest member of the board. Before continuing his schooling at Harvard, John worked at the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington, DC. For years, he has had a special commitment to the Gospel of Life. John, welcome to the table and the task! ♥

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