

2011 LIFEWATCH SERMON: “THIS LITTLE LIGHT: WE HAVE TO LET IT SHINE”

by The Reverend Dr. Edwin King

“Let your light so shine before other people, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

“This Little Light of Mine” is an old spiritual that was one of the anthems, one of the battle songs, of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This song is forever associated with Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer of Sunflower County in the Mississippi Delta. Her powerful singing of this song, with some changes in the words, inspired people everywhere and is so closely associated with her that the mention of her name calls to mind one Christian American whose faithful life demonstrated an incarnation of the light. She was a dear friend of mine and a faithful witness who spoke truth to power—even to the President whom she called Pharaoh. And she was a wise teacher who had the courage and the prophetic insight to warn of the evil and dangers of legalized abortion in America. Later I will speak more about this saint and her songs.

ACTING IN FAITH AND COURAGE

I come to you today as a veteran of many struggles in America. I was jailed and tortured in the Civil Rights Movement. I worked in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. One of my strongest memories is this United Methodist Building becoming a sanctuary when US military fired tear gas on nonviolent protesters on the Capitol grounds. I had already suffered several times from tear gas and knew how to avoid it. In this building, I helped clean up, and wipe away the tears and vomit of, the victims. Today the victims of abortion have no sanctuary. I have been the target of the KKK, the FBI, the CIA, and US military intelligence. The greatest witness the veterans of my former movements can make today is this: we never thought we would live to see most of the changes we proclaimed. We have a rare blessing in that some of us did live so long, and we do understand the doubts and depression of many struggling today for the right to life. I have attended this worship service and march in

the past. What we are now doing is not pointless, not fruitless. It must be done in faith.

Sometimes errors are made and detours taken. Why should we think our knowledge is sufficient? I sometimes wonder about things I have done that had significant results. I have counseled many willing Christians not to go to jail with some demonstrators, but to observe and then tell people what they had seen. That dialogue was more important than joining us in prison. I persuaded one willing bishop not to take the risk of facing a mob or the police and prison. I may have been wrong. The bishop could have become a hero and/or a martyr. The action may actually have prevented more violence. I do not know. I have sometimes persuaded militant black friends to put aside their guns. I have sometimes persuaded militant white friends in the Anti-War Movement to put aside their guns. Who was right? Who was faithful?

Another action like this was a few years ago at a nonviolent demonstration of right-to-life persons in Jackson, Mississippi. People planned civil disobedience to alert fellow Americans to the abortion tragedy, and I had led workshops on nonviolence. At the edge of the Jackson crowd was a young Presbyterian minister, Rev. Paul Hill. He criticized such demonstrations and actions as far too weak. Jackson Right to Life friends urged me to talk to Paul Hill, to get him not to disturb their actions, and to convince him to leave town. Paul Hill was friendly to me, for he knew something of my civil rights background. We talked. He agreed to leave town. A few years later Paul Hill shot and killed an abortion doctor in Pensacola, Florida. Later, probably thinking of himself as a Christian martyr and all but abandoned, he was executed. I may have done the right thing in pushing Hill away from us, but I did not follow through. I never wrote to him, or visited him in his home, or visited him in prison, or had further words or contact. He frightened me. I may have failed him, as I may have failed the bishop and others. But we can only do what we understand at the moment. That is why we need the fellowship of the Church—the love, support, and criticism of our brothers and sisters in Christ. But we must never fail to speak and act just because of our own doubts, confusion, and uncertainty.

Deeds are important. Action. The right deed, the

right place, the right time, the most effective witness—these are often difficult to achieve. Behind the deeds are words, study, worship, and prayer.

SONGS AND WORDS

Songs are important. The Methodist Movement was founded on Scripture and on the words of the writings and sermons of John Wesley. But the songs of Charles Wesley made the faith more accessible. Many times the hymns, the songs, were more powerful than the words.

Still, words are important. Words in church resolutions are important. Sometimes familiar words are changed to increase the power of the moment, sometimes for trivial reasons, sometimes to weaken the power of the original words. One of Dr. Martin Luther King's favorite hymns was "Once to Every Man and Nation." It is no longer in our hymnal. But there have been changes to some of its words. We do not object to "Once to Every One and Nation." But an earlier change removed some of the power. Now we sing, "By the light of burning martyrs, Christ, thy bleeding feet we track." But the original words of James Russell Lowell were, "By the light of burning heretics..."

We just opened with the familiar verse from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. But that is not the way most of us here learned in Sunday School and the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Then we said, "shine before men." But now we say, "shine before people." We agree that is a needed change.

Today I will mention several changes in hymns and in the official statements of The United Methodist Church. All of these are moving in a hopeful direction. In our concern for the right to life, many people have grown weary of the struggle and have doubts about changing, about ending, this American genocide. Yes, abortion rates may have slightly declined. But the shedding of blood of the innocent continues. Yes, there have been changes in our words approved by General Conference. But our deeds do not live up to our improving words.

In our church's words, as Paul Stallsworth and others have noted, we are, morally speaking, a pro-life church. According to its moral teaching, The United Methodist Church strongly rejects the official American legal ideology of abortion on demand. Our statements each General Conference have become stronger—more against American law, if you will. In Paragraph 161J of The Book of Discipline (2008), we refer to "the sanctity of unborn human life" and "the sacredness and well-being of the mother and the unborn child." We speak of "tragic conflicts," but that is heresy to Americans who say the issue is the individual right to choose with the only individual person being the mother. Our church rejects the new legal-political creed in America, "Abortion on Demand." Yet our church agencies, our local churches, and too many of us individual Christians do little to nothing to make deeds of our words, to incarnate them in our lives and our witness.

The United Methodist Church, throughout its history, has been known to move from words and songs to individual, institutional, and agency action. The struggles and witness of our church—often at painful, immediate cost—have helped challenge and inspire America to end slavery, to end racial segregation, to see the poor as part of our family, to question the expansion and use of the military. But this was not easy. Church members doubted each other's faith or said that this was the wrong time, the wrong place, to make that witness.

MRS. HAMER THE PROPHET

Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer said she was called to speak, to sing, to act, to witness. Her favorite Scripture was Jesus using the words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19, RSV)

Hamer was a prophet who called herself a missionary. She was born in Winona County, Mississippi, the nineteenth child of a sharecropping family living and working in extreme poverty. Married young, she could not bear a child. She worked on cotton plantations in the Delta. Her home was Sunflower County. When the youth from SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, brought the Freedom Movement to her community, she was shocked at the local black clergy who did not join and would not even let their churches be used for meetings. But she went to the courthouse with the first courageous souls trying to register to vote. She and her family lost their jobs and their home on the plantation, and they moved in with friends. Nightriders fired shots into the house. She became the oldest SNCC staff member, attended citizen education workshops with Martin Luther King's group, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and was badly beaten and permanently injured in 1963 in Mississippi. By 1964, she was one of our leaders at a national political convention and criticized President Johnson, who feared her and tried to silence her.

She also spoke truth to power in a conversation with US Senator Hubert Humphrey, who was ordered by Johnson to control the civil rights delegates or be denied the Vice Presidency. (Humphrey was a good Methodist.) Humphrey outlined to Mrs. Hamer and me all the good he could do as Vice President. Mrs. Hamer refused to bow and give in. Then she preached to him: "Sen. Humphrey, you say you are going to help the poor, the Civil Rights Movement, the old folks, the labor unions, the sick with medical care, the students in our schools, and help stop that war in Vietnam. But Sen. Humphrey, you should support us in the Civil Rights Movement, because what we want at this convention is right. Sen. Humphrey, you know what is right, and you must do what is right. Don't worry about that job that Mr. Johnson may take away from you. God will take care of you, like God took care of me when we were thrown out

of work and off the plantation. Sen. Humphrey, if you take this job of Vice President this way, you may have power, but you will never be able to do all those things for good you want to do. Sen. Humphrey, I'm going to pray to Jesus for you." The senator would not meet with Hamer after that.

When things were the most hopeless, the most desperate, in our movement, Hamer would start to sing and revive us all. She died of cancer in 1977. I visited her in the hospital almost every week in the last months of her life.

Before 1977, Mrs. Hamer had seen some great changes: white Americans had finally insisted that their democracy change, and blacks began to vote. These were changes she never expected to live to see. She also saw terrible, unexpected changes—like the United States Supreme Court legitimizing abortion.

HAMER AGAINST ABORTION

Last Saturday, January 22, was the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. It is a US Supreme Court decision which Hamer condemned, and which we mark with regret, but with determination to see it changed. I paid little attention to the news about legalized abortion. As a Christian, I knew it was wrong, but assumed most other Americans, church and temple attenders or not, would not tolerate it. I had been in India on a special, short-term program for our United Methodist Board of Missions. One of the first persons I visited, when I returned to Mississippi, was Mrs. Hamer. By then, Hamer was a great symbol of a powerful, independent woman, a heroine of the emerging Women's Rights Movement. She was the first person to make me start thinking about legalized abortion.

Mrs. Hamer said to me that we should see white racism in the legalization of abortion. She said that whites had always tried to control blacks—from slave breeding, while slave marriage was denied, to a sharecropping system that depended on large families. But now there were too many blacks in America, so this new genocide was the answer to the victories of the Civil Rights Movement. She quickly realized, and assured me, that this new so-called right to abortion was wrong for everybody, black and white. She was a new prophetic voice telling me and others that abortion is murder: "The methods used to take human lives, such as abortion, the pill, the ring, etc., amount to genocide. I believe that legal abortion is legal murder, and the use of pills and rings to prevent God's will is a great sin." (Kay Mills, This Little Light: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer [New York, NY: Dutton, 1993], p. 274)

Mrs. Hamer was right about the specific threat to black Americans. You know, or can easily find, some of the dreadful statistics. American abortion rates have been dropping, but still the slaughter of the innocents continues, and there is a racial component. In this nation, a black child in the womb is twice as likely to be killed, by abortion, as a white child in the womb. In my home of Mississippi, we have made amazing racial

progress. Black legislators represent Mrs. Hamer's home county. A white governor, Haley Barbour, praises publicly the Freedom Riders and civil rights workers, like Mrs. Hamer, who helped end the evil of segregation. But in this same Mississippi, a black child in the womb is three times more likely to be killed as a white child in the womb. There are many reasons for this: poverty, lack of education, women raising children without a father present, and abortuaries located in cities and close to black and Hispanic populations. But as Americans, as Christians, we surely know that such racial differences in the slaughter rate must indicate some racist aspect that we have not yet understood or acknowledged.

In 1964, Mrs. Hamer said, "I question America" if the grassroots people's movements are smashed by the powers in Washington, if the good will of Americans everywhere, black and white, is ignored or distorted. Of course, she was with Dr. Martin Luther King in opposing the Vietnam War and the economic and military empire King saw emerging and feared. From the terrible night of his murder in Memphis, she, like most of our movement friends and me, were convinced that elements of "the powers that be," agents of the American government, could get completely out from under the rule of law. But before that terrible night in Memphis, Dr. King had told me of his admiration for the wisdom, the witness, the preaching, and especially the singing of Mrs. Hamer, and he wanted her with him in the anti-poverty programs he planned.

FREEDOM SONGS, LIFE SONGS

With the freedom songs, Hamer and others at first changed just a few verses in familiar spirituals and hymns. At the close of this worship service, we will sing "This Little Light of Mine." But our United Methodist Hymnal omits significant verses. Hamer and others made the song theirs by saying the light was "the light of freedom" and would shine "all over the Delta, all over Parchman (prison), all over Washington, all over the world."

In our hymnal, we do say we will let the light shine, everywhere, and all through the night. Hamer would sing it this way: "This little light of mine, Jesus gave it to me. I have the light of freedom. I have to let it shine." That is the insight of a true disciple.

Fannie Lou Hamer spoke as a theologian, although that was not one of her own words. She combined several spirituals into one freedom song and captured the essence of the Old Testament Passover, deliverance from slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh, and the Gospel lesson of the Incarnation, the coming of Christ, the true freedom from slavery to sin and doubt and failure. She used the Christmas/Epiphany spiritual "Go, Tell It on the Mountain." "When I was a watchman, I sought both night and day, I asked the Lord to help me, and he showed me the way. Go, tell it on the mountain, over the fields and everywhere. Go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born." She combined this with an anti-slavery song, "Go Down, Moses:" "When Israel

was in Egypt's land, let my people go; oppressed so hard they could not stand, let my people go. Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land; tell old Pharaoh to let my people go./Paul and Silas bound in jail, had no money for to go their bail, let my people go. Paul and Silas began to shout, let my people go; jail door opened and they walked out. Let my people go./Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go, tell it on the mountain, to let my people go."

Now that is preaching: Go, tell it on the mountain and everywhere, to let my people go, because Jesus Christ is born!

Today, as her friend, comrade, and student, I think Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer might change the words again to "let the children go" from Pharaoh's land of abortion, and "let the children live," because Jesus Christ is born.

We have another freedom song in our hymnal that we have not fully understood. It is wonderful that people everywhere can sing "We Shall Overcome." In our hymnal's version, there is little to dread and fear. But the song has roots in the white labor union songs and black hymns. It is based on another combination of lessons from the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the movement, facing terror, we understood the source in Psalm 56: "Be gracious to me, O God, for men trample upon me; all day long foemen oppress me; my enemies trample upon me all day long, for many fight against me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in thee. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust without a fear. What can flesh do to me?... Then my enemies will be turned back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me." (vv. 1-4 and 9, RSV) And some other translations read, "God is on my side." Today many do not recognize that this freedom anthem has a Biblical base, such as: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith." (I John 5:4, RSV) Our present hymnal version is too upbeat. It omits the verses, "We are not afraid..." And why no fear? Because, we sing, "God is on our side."

Throughout the world, struggles for freedom and justice now sing "We Shall Overcome." This summer I visited Prague, where students used this song in their struggle against the Soviets. It was used in Poland, Germany, China, and now by the Palestinians. In our movement to end legalized abortion and to free the children, we should rejoice that we can sing this song. "We shall overcome!"

Dr. King is a retired member of the Mississippi Conference and of the sociology/medical ethics faculty in the School of Health Related Professions at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.♥

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

HOW TO SET UP A LIFEWATCH TABLE AT YOUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Dr. John E. Juergensmeyer

The process is very simple. First, contact the person in charge of display tables at your conference headquarters. There is usually a brief form to complete, and sometimes a modest fee to pay. The relationship of Lifewatch and The United Methodist Church is a common concern that might be presented to you. A copy of our letterhead and/or newsletter should persuade the questioner that Lifewatch is a recognized caucus or renewal ministry within United Methodism.

A conference staffer will give you the dates and times that the display area is available. Typically, a table suited for a fellowship hall will be provided. For display and distribution materials, you can download items from www.lifewatch.org, and then copy them. Also, you can request copies of materials from Cindy Evans at the Lifewatch office. I have found that two accordion-fold display boards—available from Office Max—are a quick and easy way of displaying samples of the available literature.

I also provide a sign-up/comment sheet for interested persons. The people who sign this sheet are added to the Lifewatch subscription list. Also, I have been very interested in the comments provided by conference attendees. The most common is: "I never knew that a United Methodist, pro-life organization exists." Many conference attendees express support for Lifewatch's ministry.

Lifewatch materials on petitions related to The Book of Discipline and to post-abortion counseling have received many comments. Back copies of Lifewatch, the newsletter, particularly those that contain the annual Lifewatch sermon, have been well received.

I usually stand at the table during the advertised hours of display table attendance, but that varies from year to year. When there has been no announced time, I use my own judgment as to when traffic will be heaviest. At other times, I simply leave the table display unattended, although with fewer leaflets on the table.

In summary, the display table has been a valuable opportunity to spread knowledge of the Gospel of Life and Lifewatch, and to meet members of Annual Conference, both clergy and lay, who are interested in pro-life concerns.

Please plan now to arrange for a Lifewatch table at your Annual Conference! Please get involved in this witness for life!

—Dr. John Juergensmeyer, PhD, JD is a Lifewatch Advisory Board member, a lay member of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference, and a member of Wesley United Methodist Church of Elgin, IL.♥

ANTI-CATHOLICISM IN METHODIST HISTORY

“God in America,” the six-part documentary on religion in America, aired on PBS during October of 2010. It proved to be engaging, interesting, and instructive. In this pastor’s opinion, the DVD of “God in America” is ideal for showing and discussing in a local church on Sunday evenings. It can open up laity and clergy to the many worlds of American religion of yesterday and today.

One of the startling segments of “God in America” retold the anti-Catholicism of most Protestants during the 19th and 20th centuries. As waves of Catholic immigrants came to America, anti-Catholic sentiment and reaction arose and increased. This reaction to Catholicism was institutionalized in the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which once understood itself as a patriotic safeguard against the increasing numbers of Catholics (and blacks and Jews) in the United States.

AGAINST THE CATHOLICS

The anti-Catholicism of that time can be illustrated with an incident that occurred in Birmingham, AL. On August 11, 1921, Rev. Edwin R. Stephenson, a Methodist minister, shot to death Father James E. Coyle, a Catholic priest, in front of many witnesses on a street. Why? Fr. Coyle had just presided over the marriage of Rev. Stephenson’s daughter to a Roman Catholic of Puerto Rican descent. The KKK circled its wagons around Rev. Stephenson, raised money for his defense, and hired Hugo Black as his lead defense attorney. The result was shocking: Rev. Stephenson left the courtroom a free man and never apologized for his murder of the priest. Later, Hugo Black joined the KKK, was elected to the US Senate with Klan support, and eventually became a US Supreme Court justice. (For a more complete account of this series of troubling events, see “When America Feared and Reviled Catholics” [[Los Angeles Times](#), October 10, 2010] by Sharon Davies, who is a law professor at Ohio State University.)

Needless to say, American Catholics recognized, and at times resisted, the anti-Catholicism around them. In North Carolina decades ago, for example, Catholics published a journal entitled Truth to counter anti-Catholic falsehoods that circulated among Protestants at the time.

Anti-Catholics in America maintained commitment to a certain legal principle: “In the last part of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, nativists (including the KKK) popularized separation [of church and state] as an American constitutional principle, eventually leading to a near consensus supporting some form of separation.

“Separation was a crucial part of the KKK’s jurisprudential agenda. It was included in the Klansman’s Creed (or was it the Klansman’s Creed?). Before he joined the Court, Justice Black was head of

new members for the largest Klan cell in the South. New members of the KKK had to pledge their allegiance to the ‘eternal separation of Church and State.’ In 1947, Black was the author of *Everson*, the first Supreme Court case to hold that the first amendment’s establishment clause requires separation of church and state. The suit in *Everson* was brought by an organization that at various times had ties to the KKK.” (Jim Lindgren, a law professor at Northwestern University, “How Separation of Church and State Was Read into the Constitution [Hint: The KKK Got Its Way]” from www.volokh.com)

In the presidential politics of 1960, Protestant critics of John F. Kennedy included bishops of the Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches, and Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (today’s Americans United for the Separation of Church and State). (See Shaun Casey’s [Kennedy vs. Nixon](#), Oxford University Press, 2009)

Such has been the far reach of anti-Catholicism in American history. It is a topic that we United Methodists would rather avoid and forget.

UNITED METHODISM AND ABORTION: THE OUTLINE

But this disturbing current of American history must be remembered, perhaps especially when considering The United Methodist Church’s first official position on abortion. Before the 1968 merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren, abortion had not been mentioned in [The Book of Discipline](#). After the merger, the 1972 General Conference approved “Birth and Death” for the church’s Social Principles. “Birth and Death” included this sentence on the decriminalization of abortion: “We support the removal of abortion from the criminal code, placing it instead under laws relating to other procedures of standard medical practice.” ([The Book of Discipline](#) [1972], p. 87) With that one sentence, United Methodism firmly placed its flag on the pro-choice side of the abortion debate in American society. But how did that happen? And why did that happen?

According to Dr. Albert C. Outler (“Does Our Abortion Stand Reflect the Church’s Position?,” [The Christian Advocate](#), September 16, 1971), this sentence in “Birth and Death” actually emerged out of the special General Conference of 1970, which was called to complete the work of the 1968 General Conference, which had been overwhelmed by merger concerns. According to Dr. Outler, this position on abortion had been formulated, and lobbied for, by the Board of Christian Social Concerns, which is now known as the General Board of Church and Society. Furthermore, in Outler’s view, this position had not been sufficiently considered and debated, before it was adopted, by the conference. Indeed, this pro-choice position was, in Outler’s words, “rammed through the General Conference.”

Soon after that victory, the Board of Christian Social Concerns published Abortion: A Human Choice to reinforce and advance the church's new pro-choice position. This pamphlet included an essay by Dr. John Swomley, who argued against the pro-life position of Dr. Paul Ramsey, the distinguished Christian ethicist and United Methodist who taught at Princeton University. Outler noted "Swomley's patronizing reference to Ramsey's position as 'paralleling the papal position'..." Over the years, Dr. Swomley made many such snarky comments against the Catholic Church and its moral teaching.

Dr. Swomley's anti-Catholic aside, in Abortion: A Human Choice, is not an isolated statement from a single individual with a blind spot. Rather, it comes from a tradition of anti-Catholicism that has a history: anti-Catholicism once prevailed in American society and even in the American Methodist community.

So it appears that anti-Catholicism played a role, however large or small, in establishing United Methodism's first position on abortion. To be sure, anti-Catholicism was certainly not the only factor that contributed to United Methodism's first statement on abortion. The Sexual Revolution, the Women's Movement, and the partisan politics of the time certainly played major roles as well. Still, anti-Catholicism appears to have been present at the beginning of our denominational wrong turn. Unfortunately. (Paul T. Stallsworth) ♥

ABORTION TODAY

*"A [Philadelphia, PA] doctor who provided abortions for minorities, immigrants, and poor women has been charged with eight counts of murder in the deaths of a patient and seven babies who were born alive and then killed with scissors, prosecutors said Wednesday. Dr. Kermit Gosnell, 69, made millions of dollars over 30 years, performing as many illegal, late-term abortions as he could, prosecutors said. State regulators ignored complaints about him and had failed to inspect his clinic since 1993, but no charges were warranted against them given time limits and existing law, District Attorney Seth Williams said. Nine of Gosnell's employees also were charged." (Maryclaire Dale and Patrick Walters, AP, The News & Observer, January 20, 2011) "In its report, the grand jury said failures of the Pennsylvania Department of Health and other agencies allowed Gosnell's 'house of horrors' to persist for decades, with baby body parts on the shelves and clogging the plumbing, a 15-year-old high school student administering intravenous anesthesia, and Gosnell's wife, a cosmetologist, performing late-term procedures." (Dale and Walters, AP, The News & Observer, January 21, 2011)

*New York City is "officially the abortion capital of America. A health department report released last month proves it: about 40% of all pregnancies in the

city end that way, an average of about 90,000 a year in recent years." (Ariel Kaminer, New York Times, January 21, 2011) Racially speaking, about 20% of white unborn children in New York City are aborted, about 40% of Hispanic unborn children in New York City are aborted, and about 60% of black unborn children in New York City are aborted. No wonder Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, accompanied by other religious leaders in the city, stepped up to a microphone, called this "downright chilling," and bravely challenged the city "to come together to make abortion rare, a goal even those who work to expand the abortion license tell us they share." (press release, Archdiocese of New York, January 6, 2011)

*"[A]s we reported back in September [2010], PPFA [Planned Parenthood Federation of America] Factsheets revealed that abortions had jumped a whopping 6% to 324,008 while the number of adoption referrals had dropped by more than 10%. We don't have reliable national count yet for 2008, but considered as a percentage of the latest national annual abortion figure the Guttmacher Institute reported for 2005, this would make Planned Parenthood responsible for 26.8% of all abortions performed in the U.S. This easily cements [Planned Parenthood's] place as America's top abortion chain." (Dave Andrusko, "Combating PPFA," National Right to Life News, p. 10)

*Does The United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society have anything to say in response to these grim realities? (Paul T. Stallsworth) ♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

17 December 2010

Dear Lifewatch:

Keep up the good work!

Have you ever included pro-life, Jewish theologians/rabbis in Lifewatch? I believe this would increase the power of our witness by tying into the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. After all, Jeremiah speaks of "the ancient roads" (18:15, RSV).

Your scholarship has edified me in many ways. Yours is a good work for the universal Church, and God is pleased. May His blessings chase after you!
Yours for life,
Brian Phillip Hanson/ 815 Wildwood Road/Waterloo, IA 50702

30 January 2011

To the Editor:

I share your prayer that God's mercy might be sufficient for John M. Swomley, Jr. (Lifewatch, 12/01/10, pp. 7-8)

You were spot on in noting Dr. Swomley's inconsistency as a champion of the rights of the "weak, vulnerable and needy," while also supporting legalized abortion. There is the possibility, however that you underreported how instrumental he was in branding The

United Methodist Church as “pro-choice.”

The brevity of your printed remarks might leave your readers with the incorrect impression that, except for church-and-state arguments for the pro-choice side, he remained silent about abortion. Lifewatch battles valiantly to “un-ring” the bell of United Methodism’s former pro-choice declarations, and Dr. Swomley was the author of perhaps the most harmful of them all.

Christian Social Action was a magazine once published by the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church. In that publication’s April 1990 issue, John Swomley placed his “Human Beings: In God’s Image.” This article was reprinted in 1993 in Moral Issues and Christian Response, which was edited by Paul T. Jersild and Dale A. Johnson.

In his article/chapter, Dr. Swomley proclaimed and defended a number of liberal, “pro-choice Christian” assertions which remain etched in the minds of countless United Methodists today. He asserted that: 1) abortion was “widely practiced” in Biblical times, Israel’s neighbors were anti-abortion, but the God of the Bible was not; 2) in Exodus 21:22-25, “the woman, undeniably, had greater moral and religious worth than the fetus; 3) “[t]here is also reference in the Mosaic law to ‘abortion on request’ (Numbers 5:11-31);” 4) “[a]side from these passages, the Bible does not deal with abortion...there is no condemnation or prohibition of abortion anywhere in the Bible...;” and 5) regarding the question of the beginning of human life, “[t]he Bible’s clear answer is that human life begins at birth with breathing.”

Hopefully, most Lifewatch readers instantly recognize the fallacies in these assertions, but anyone who does not should immediately seek out a competent

pro-life mentor. It is essential that misstatements #1 and #4 be addressed with reference to ritual child-killing—“sacrificed to the god Molech,” etc. A dominant theme in the Old Testament is God’s condemnation of people conceiving children whom they do not raise, because they kill them. The alleged credit, in the eyes of an idol, made child sacrifice preferable to, and easier than, any grisly attempts to abort a child before birth. Abortion and infanticide are identical in their result, and the God of the Bible is adamant in demanding that parents must not intentionally kill their children.

Thank you for your faithful, godly work!
Pastor Roger Domingo (retired), Indiana Conference,
<rogdomingo@gmail.com> ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• Thank you—and thank you again—for your many monetary gifts to the ministry of Lifewatch. Your faithfulness allows Lifewatch to attempt to be faithful in upholding the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church.

Those who would like to give a gift to Lifewatch should know there are three ways to give: (1) send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338; (2) use PayPal, by clicking on the “Make a Donation” icon, on our homepage at www.lifewatch.org; and (3) donate stocks by contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office.

• Rabbi Marc Gellman—of the Temple Beth Torah in Melville, NY—writes “The God Squad,” an engaging, syndicated newspaper column on religion. Writing in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, Rabbi Gellman offers up “Catastrophology Response No. 3:

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Help 'em." "The best speech I ever heard was two sentences long. A Jewish grandpa, who as a boy in Poland during World War II escaped the Holocaust by fleeing into the forest, was blessing his grandson in my synagogue on the occasion of his bar mitzvah. He looked at the boy and said quietly and tearfully, 'In your life, you're going to meet people who need help. If you can help 'em, help 'em.' That's all he said because that's all he needed to say." (The News & Observer, January 28, 2010) When it comes to the unborn child and mother, what should we United Methodists see, say, and do? "Help 'em."

- On a recent trip to Kansas City just before the November elections, a copy of The Catholic Key, which is published by the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, came to this editor's attention. The October 8, 2010 issue's page 12 contained a political advertisement, which was bought by the Missouri Right to Life PAC. This ad compared the positions on life of two candidates for the seat, of the 5th Congressional District of Missouri, in the US House of Representatives. Mr. Jacob Turk, the ad promised, "will protect life" if elected. Mr. Emanuel Cleaver II, the other candidate, "does not protect human life" and has the voting record to prove it. For those concerned about protecting the unborn child and mother from abortion, this election decision was not difficult to make. The sadness is that Emanuel Cleaver II is a United Methodist minister and a member of the Missouri Annual Conference. Unfortunately, his denomination has failed to inform him that the Christian truth of the God-given dignity of the human person includes the unborn child and even the human embryo. That, too, is a sadness. And by the way, Rev. Cleaver is still Rep. Cleaver.

- What about the general results of the November 2010 elections? Mr. Douglas Johnson, the Legislative Director of the National Right to Life Committee, replies: "Overall, there has been a net shift in the pro-life direction in the [US House of Representatives] of 40 to 55 votes, depending on the issue. This brings

within the realm of possibility full house approval of a permanent, government-wide prohibition on federal subsidies for abortion, such as the No Taxpayer Funding of Abortion Act proposed by Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ), which has already been endorsed as a priority in the 'Pledge to America' issued by the incoming Republican majority leadership in October. It also set the stage for a battle royal of legislation to repeal the Obamacare law itself and replace it with something consistent with pro-life principles.

"The election results were good in the [US] Senate, as well, where the net shift in the pro-life direction will be from four to seven votes, depending on the issue. No senator is being replaced by a successor who has a weaker position on abortion." ("Lawmakers Who Defected from Pro-life Side on Health Care Paid a Big Price at Ballot Box," National Right to Life News, November/December 2010, p. 23)

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

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