

**Bishop Bruce R. Ough (President of the Council of Bishops):** “The distinct and diverse opinions among [the Commission on a Way Forward] members reflect the richness and vitality of The United Methodist Church.” (Statement on Judicial Council Decision 1341, April 28, 2017)

**Lifewatch:** Individuals have opinions. The Church has teaching.

## IN MEMORY OF THOMAS C. ODEN

by Dr. Leicester R. Longden

*Thomas C. Oden died on December 8, 2016. Tom was a United Methodist clergyman, who was a great theologian for The Great Tradition of the Church. There are many thoughtful remembrances of Tom that can be easily googled and read. Below, I will remember Tom by offering a letter I wrote to him in 2004. Some post-2004 memories have been edited into the following letter. (LRL)*

Dear Tom:

All Saints Day seems like a good one to write this letter. I am writing to say thank you for your work as a teacher of the Church, and especially for all that you, as a teacher, mentor, and friend, have done for me.

Your Retirement Colloquium was a wonderful event. Not only did it pay necessary tribute to your life's work. It also portrayed your career in a holistic way and generated many thoughts in me and those present about our own vocations. These thoughts call forth gratitude.

There was one element missing, I think, in your Retirement Colloquium. Although it was touched upon, no one really tackled your polemical, Kierkegaardian, renewalist role in mainline Christianity. Perhaps that topic is better approached in a different setting than a retirement context. On the other hand, given the vaunted political engagement of liberal academics, it is too bad they could not engage, or describe intellectually, the argumentative character of your work. For those who read your work developmentally, it is clear you had already worked out in Agenda for Theology (1979) that an irenicism that listens goes with a polemicism that confronts.

I can still remember standing in a religious book store in 1979 or 1980, and eagerly reading your Agenda. It spoke directly to my condition of disappointment in The United Methodist Church. Many of my fellow pastors seemed uninterested in the Gospel itself. They

wanted to be amateur therapists or political activists. It took me a few more years—with testing and failing and discerning—but I eventually showed up in your graduate-school classes at Drew University's Theological School in 1984. This was an answer to prayer and one of the most significant changes of direction in my theological vocation. It was your book that kept me aiming at a “theological existence.”

You were a professor who closely listened to your students, and you were truly Socratic in an environment that was becoming more and more enamored of, and constricted by, categories of class, race, and gender. Your seminars on the doctrine of God, Kierkegaard, and Wesley were exciting intellectual conversations which required us to struggle with texts in the light of the whole of the Christian tradition.

As a real conversation partner with your students, you often shared with us drafts of the books you were writing, and you would surprise us with the generous listing of our names, alongside serious senior scholars, in the acknowledgments section of your books when they went to print. Once, when we asked for writing advice, you pointed to the draft you had shared with us and said, “This is my eleventh draft,” revealing how you wrote within a community of Christian conversation.

I am also grateful for your invitation in 1994 to join you and others in the meeting which evolved into The Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church. My return to the parish after completing my doctorate was initially a great personal trial. I almost failed. But your invitation to remain theologically engaged, at whatever post the Lord had assigned me, resulted in great blessing for me and a remarkable healing in the Trinity United Methodist congregation in Lansing. I cannot thank you enough for this. It was the mark of a true theological mentor. You did not forget about my work because I did not immediately enter the academic realm; you saw it whole and within the church—a sign to me of the integrity of your theological perspective.

Thank you, Tom, for the patience, persistence, and

tenacity with which you pursued the retrieval of a “classical consensual tradition.” Breaking free—indeed repenting—of the chains and blinders of modernity, you pioneered a pathway for many of us. Seeing how your various projects have led to the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series, even though they may not have been in your mind at the beginning—this gave me courage to keep working at my vocation when I still could not see what tapestry all the threads were actually weaving.

Your ability to engage all people in conversation was especially clear to your former students when you published your memoir, A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir (2014). Many of us had seen, up close, attempts by students and faculty to sideline or shame you in the university community for your outspoken questions about the theological reasoning of various radical theologians. Your willingness to speak frankly and pastorally about abortion and end-of-life issues had garnered visible hostility. Yet your memoir was gracious and generous to all your detractors.

For all this, I am very grateful, Tom. Every year I become more aware of what a gift you, your witness, and your work have been to me as a disciple, a teacher, and a pastor.

Your student and friend in Christ,  
Les

*Dr. Leicester R. Longden, who lives in Michigan, is an Associate Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship Emeritus at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. A version of the above was originally published in Catalyst, an online newsletter for United Methodist seminarians, pastors, and leaders ([www.catalystresources.org](http://www.catalystresources.org)); and it is reprinted with permission.♥*

## FOR ALL THE SAINTS

Four people crucial to pro-life witness in the United States have met the end of their days in this world. Each deserves a word of remembrance.

**Dr. Jean Garton** died on December 23, 2016. For years, Dr. Garton was a leading voice for Lutherans for Life. Her book Who Broke the Baby? (1979, 1998) was an indispensable part of her witness. At the 2016 National Right to Life Convention, Dr. Garton offered a speech that contained these loving, truthful words: “When Jesus came into my life, He did not come alone. He brought His friends—His special loved ones: the lost, the helpless, those who hurt and hunger; He brought the unwanted, non-productive, unplanned, and the inconvenient, and I learned from Jesus that Christianity is not a spectator sport.” (Jacki Ragan, “Farewell Jean Garton, Farewell My Friend...,” National Right to Life News Today, January 30, 2017, [www.nationalrighttolifenews.org](http://www.nationalrighttolifenews.org), accessed on 03/05/17)

Dr. Garton was faithful to Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life, to the end. She was an inspirational and encouraging friend of Lifewatch.

**Dr. Mildred Jefferson** died back in 2010, but she deserves to be recalled. Dr. Jefferson was the first African American woman to graduate from Harvard Medical School (1971), the first woman to intern at Boston City Hospital, and the first woman to become a surgeon at the Boston University Medical Center. “It was in 1970 when the American Medical Association proclaimed that it was ethical for doctors to perform abortions wherever it was legal. Dr. Jefferson was outraged by this assault on the Hippocratic Oath and on Judeo-Christian values. ‘I’m opposed to abortion as a doctor and also because I know it is morally wrong,’ she said. ‘An individual never has the private right to choose to kill for whatever reasons, be they whim, convenience or compulsion. Because I know abortion is wrong, I will use every means available for free people in a free country to see that it is not perpetuated.’” (John Stonestreet, “One Doctor’s Prescription for Life,” Breakpoint Daily, February 23, 2017, [www.breakpoint.org](http://www.breakpoint.org), accessed on 03/05/17)

**Ms. Norma McCorvey** died on February 18, 2017. She was the “Jane Roe” in the United States Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. Though Ms. McCorvey neither wanted nor obtained an abortion, she was used by pro-choice activists to overturn Texas law against abortion and, later at the Supreme Court, to overturn all state laws against abortion. Ms. McCorvey later entered the Roman Catholic Church and became a strong voice for life. At the time of her conversion, she noted, “I think it is safe to say that the entire abortion industry is based on a lie.... I am dedicated to spending the rest of my life undoing the law that bears my name.” She carried on, “You read about me in history books, but now I am dedicated to spreading the truth about preserving the dignity of all human life from natural conception to natural death.” (Steven Ertelt, “Norma McCorvey, Jane Roe of Roe v. Wade, Passes Away: She Never Had an Abortion and Became Pro-Life,” February 18, 2017, [www.lifenews.com](http://www.lifenews.com), accessed on 03/02/17)

**Dr. Michael Novak** crossed the Jordan on February 17, 2017. As a wide-ranging writer, he tackled many different topics and issues that came running down the field of American public life. The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (1982), a volume on political economy, seemed especially to elevate Novak in the public (and not just political) debates of our time. But also sports, domestic and foreign policy, philosophy, and theology were among his favorite topics. Throughout his body of work was a consistent Catholic commitment to the dignity of, which included the possibilities within, the human person. This connected to explicit and implicit concern for the weakest among us, including the unborn child and mother. As a former intern of Novak when he was at the American Enterprise Institute, I was regularly informed by his thoughtful writing. Marsha and I were very pleased

to attend his memorable funeral mass in the Lower Crypt Church beneath the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.

Thanks be to God for these faithful witnesses to the Gospel of Life. May God's perpetual light shine brightly upon each of them. (PTS)♥

## ERIC METAXAS AT THE MARCH FOR LIFE

*The following remarks were made by Mr. Eric Metaxas at the 2017 March for Life in Washington, DC. Mr. Metaxas is the author of Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery (HarperOne, 2007) and Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy (Thomas Nelson, 2010), provides radio commentary (with Mr. John Stonestreet) on "BreakPoint," and hosts the daily, two-hour "Eric Metaxas Show" on radio. On stage, in front of tens of thousands who would march, Mr. Metaxas held forth in this way. (PTS)*

"Live from DC. It's the March for Life!

"Praise God!

"Jesus is Lord!

"ABC News, are you covering that?

"ABC News, are you covering this?

"You want to see the women of America? Here they are!

"This is the inclusive march, where as long as you are alive and a human being, you are welcome.

"I think we have all heard of 'fake news.' Right? Well, here is an announcement. You can tweet this out: Roe v. Wade is fake law.

"And in the words of Reagan, to paraphrase a great pro-life president, let me say to the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court: Justice Roberts, tear down this law!

"Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, 'Abortion is murder.' He also said, 'We have to have compassion on those who have been driven to make this tragic choice.'

"We are all sinners. We all need the forgiveness of the God of the Bible. And we pray that this message of love and forgiveness would get out to the women of America, that the God of the Bible and everyone who follows Him loves those women who have made this tragic choice, and wants to extend the love of Jesus to those women.

"ABC News, are you covering this?

"The media in America have not told the other side of the story: that women have been the victims of abortion, and that abortion hurts women.

"Will ABC News cover the fact that many women are bullied into making this choice by men in their lives? It is not their choice. If they had a real choice, they would never make this choice.

"And also, I have a question: if the DNA of the baby in the womb is different than the DNA of the mother, how can it be the mother's body we are talking about?

"Here's something else for twitter: Roe v. Wade is anti-science.

"The science today—more and more and more and more, and it is why there are so many young people here!—says that that is a person in the womb. We need to get real, and stop pretending [the unborn] is anything but that.

"Now, I have a final statement. I want to say this. Yes, I am outraged. [But] I have not thought a lot about blowing up Madonna's house. And the reason I have not thought a lot about blowing up Madonna's house is because the Lord I follow commands me to love my enemies. Because I and many of us here are 'Jesus freaks,' we obey the Lord of Life. And when Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies, we are crazy, we do it.

"I would like you to join me right now in praying for Madonna. Madonna, Jesus loves you, and we are going to pray that His love be revealed to you, and everybody that was at the Women's March (on January 21, 2017). Let us pray for Madonna right now....

"Father, God, in the mighty name of Jesus, we lift up your daughter, Madonna. We ask you, Lord, to show her your love. Show her that you love her, that you are with her, and that you want her to know you personally. And we pray for Katie Couric, and we pray for all the women who were at that march, that they would know that you love them, and that we here love them. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

"God bless you."♥

## THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

That is the title of a colloquy held at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University (Atlanta, GA) on March 10-12. Almost thirty scholars, officially called "participants" during the colloquy, presented and discussed papers on the topic at hand. (It has been promised that, within a year, before the special General Conference occurs in 2019, their papers will be published in a book.) In addition, many "observers," such as your scribe, were also present.

In the points that follow, I will offer random comments and commentary on what I observed during the colloquy at Candler.

### 1. Extraordinary Event

First, a general comment. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) and the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools should be highly commended for organizing and overseeing this colloquy. It was the most bountiful theological feast, sponsored by The United Methodist Church, that I have attended during my forty years of pastoral ministry. Wonderful! Great

work! Congratulations! (It was almost injurious to the health and well being of this observer to remain silent during the various discussions.)

## 2. Magazine Bias

Each participant and each observer received a copy of National Geographic's Special Issue on the "Gender Revolution" (January 2017). It was a good reminder of what is going on right now in the world out there—thanks in large part to the Sexual Revolution. What is called "gender ideology" is all over the place. "Choice" is its driver. "Confusion" and "chaos" its result. In its Biblical and Traditional teaching on human sexuality, the Church must thoughtfully and lovingly engage and oppose exactly this post-modern, sexual ideology.

## 3. Suspect Spectra

"The spectrum," very early on in the colloquy, became a suspect phrase. There is "the spectrum" of gender identification (as opposed to the "binary" approach), and there is "the spectrum" of theological and moral beliefs (or opinions) United Methodists hold on human sexuality (progressive to orthodox). Unfortunately, "the spectrum" is all too often about relativism, biological and theological and moral. To be sure, every one of us has our beliefs, opinions, and preferences about everything—including theological and moral claims regarding sexuality. But the Church—including The United Methodist Church—has teaching, truthful teaching (or doctrine, real doctrine), on these matters. In the Church, such doctrine is given a prior and privileged place over the countless personal preferences and opinions that are located along any "spectrum." The doctrine is there to be persuasively proposed by the Church's leaders—bishops, pastors, professors, and lay leaders. And the doctrine calls into question this assumption that is now so very common in American popular culture: "You get to follow your sexual desires, wherever they might lead. Let no one stand in your way!" On the other hand, Church doctrine, in the service of God's Word, when graciously and communally offered, can lead to abundant, joyful living.

## 4. Good Coaching

During an orientation session for observers, Rev. Ray Bailey, the Deputy General Secretary of GBHEM, made an impassioned plea for all at the colloquy to work hard, to do our best, and to strive for excellence—for the sake of the church. "The United Methodist Church deserves our best," he implored, "and we owe the church the best we can offer." This colloquy, Rev. Bailey made clear, is about service of Christ's Church—not academic gamesmanship or parlor chatter. Amen.

## 5. Self-Centered

In her thoughtful and personal opening remarks, Dr. Jan Love, Candler's Dean and Professor of

Christianity and World Politics, recalled a famous Cuban statement, "Every head is a world." This saying fits quite comfortably in today's American culture—a culture that promotes "autonomous individualism," "expressive individualism," "the sovereign self," call it what you will. However, if "every head is a world," including those "head[s]" that are in the Church, then the Church is challenged greatly to be authoritative—not authoritarian and not relativistic—in her teaching and living. A piece of that challenge, Dr. Love noted, is for Christians humbly, gently, and patiently to be able to "dialogue despite the offense" that is often experienced.

## 6. Doctrine v. Theology

Bishop Ken Carter, of The Florida Area, recalled Dr. Thomas Langford (once the Dean of Duke Divinity School and a professor of theology there) saying that "doctrine reflects the grasp of the Church, and theology the reach of the Church"—and that doctrine is the cathedral, theology its renovation. In other words, doctrine is what the Church takes to be true; and theology is pursued by individuals within the Church, for the possible renewal and reform of the Church.

Knowingly or not, Bp. Carter illustrated the difference between doctrine and theology by recalling an incident from his days as a pastor. Because of The United Methodist Church's teaching on human sexuality, a couple had left the congregation he was pastoring. The couple's theology on human sexuality differed from the denomination's doctrine on the matter. After visiting with the couple and hearing their concerns, they asked what he thought. "You are not leaving this church," Carter boldly replied. They indeed returned to their United Methodist congregation, held onto their dissenting theology, and had a renewing impact on their Sunday School class—even though the larger church had not changed its standing doctrine.

## 7. Absurdity Avoided

On Thursday night to the observers and on Friday morning to the participants and observers, Dr. Kim Cape, the General Secretary of GBHEM, noted the absurdity of The United Methodist Church trying to make momentous decisions apart from her intellectual life and leaders. Hence, this colloquy! Dr. Cape is correct. Theological input is absolutely essential and necessary for The United Methodist Church to deliberate and decide faithfully—during the called 2019 General Conference, before it, and after it. However, because of the diversity of theologians and theological perspectives in the church today, and because of academic theology's tendency to wander into the weeds of detail, theology alone will not be sufficient in leading the church to make significant, historic decisions in the days to come.

## 8. “Acceptance” Undefined

The colloquy’s first major presentation, by Dr. Gregory A. Smith, was based on his data from the Pew Research Center, “a nonpartisan American ‘fact tank.’” (A “fact tank.” That seems a tad bit presumptuous.) Dr. Smith noted that, in recent years, polls have been tracking the increasing “acceptance” of homosexuality and same-sex marriage in the United States and beyond. That raises a question. What exactly does “acceptance” mean? Social tolerance? Moral approval? Religious support? Something else? Of course the wording of polling questions, with their unstated biases, has a profound influence on the answers offered in response. In this case, Pew apparently wanted to find lots of “acceptance” (whatever that means) in various societies and in their churches, and to find it increasing. Mission accomplished.

## 9. Cultural Winds

Some elites in The United Methodist Church—beginning with bishops, and including others—seem to have a misplaced faith in social science and its usefulness to the Church. Remember the Call to Action, the year 2010, and our denomination spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on social-scientific research on our church done by Towers Watson? That research was going to help turn around the United Methodist household. But it didn’t. Now, years later, the denomination is hoping, once again, that social-scientific research will help the church get through its present travail. This time the rescue by social science aims to keep the church unified in the midst of a protracted conflict over human sexuality.

Now let’s be honest. In hiring Pew to provide polling data to this colloquy, The United Methodist Church (or at least GBHEM and the seminary association) are—so to speak—licking a denominational index finger, placing that finger in the air, and thereby checking to see in which direction the cultural winds related to human sexuality are blowing. Exactly that cultural-wind check was the first major presentation in this colloquy. So, it seems, the underlying assumption of colloquy organizers could be that, on its doctrine and discipline related to human sexuality, The United Methodist Church needs to change course and be guided by the cultural winds of our time. A highly debatable assumption, that.

## 10. Movement - Denomination - Church

During discussion of the presentation by Dr. Charles Wood (Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University)—on “Wonder, Love, and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church” by the Committee on Faith and Order of The United Methodist Church (available online)—reference was made to the Methodist Movement, in America and over time, becoming a denomination. Well, that is exactly what happened. Now, in the midst of conflict over human sexuality, that denomination, named The United Methodist Church, is struggling to become Church, truly Church. So, the

Methodist Movement grows into an American denomination, and that American denomination is striving to mature into Church. That is precisely what is at stake in the contemporary struggle over human sexuality in The United Methodist Church. And that is why some suffering is involved.

## 11. Church Politics

Dr. Wood noted that “polity (or church organization or government) is the dark side of the Good News.” In a denomination, in which polity is understood as a necessary evil, that is true. But in the Church, in which polity is understood as a part of Christ’s headship and leadership of the People of God, that is not true. In the Church (as opposed to denomination), polity should be a part, an embodiment, of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## 12. Freedom to Think

Dr. Billy Abraham, of Perkins at SMU, reminded his small group of scholars that “the Church is not just an extended seminar.” So true. Even so, there is theological work to be done in The United Methodist Church, and Dr. Abraham will be centrally important in contributing to that effort.

Also, Dr. Abraham commented that The United Methodist Church will need freedom to think, to consider, to deliberate, and to decide in the months ahead. Freedom, let it be said, is not furthered by bullying, intimidating, and disrupting people in the church and at General Conference.

## 13. Sexual Morality

Dr. Kendall Soulen, of Candler, raised this important question: Does The United Methodist Church’s teaching on human sexuality rise to the level of status confessionis? That is, must The United Methodist Church teach truthfully on human sexuality to remain faithful to the Gospel? In other words, in The United Methodist Church, with regard to doctrine and discipline on human sexuality, is the Gospel at stake? Or, finally, is human sexuality a church-dividing matter for The United Methodist Church? Yes! is the answer to all these questions. The Biblical witness (especially on marriage) and the Wesleyan tradition (especially on holiness) make that abundantly clear.

## 14. Conference and Substance

Dr. Russell Richey, now of Duke Divinity School, reminded his small group that the idea, and the practice, of “conference” is key to understanding The United Methodist Church. Dr. Richey is correct. Think about it. General Conference. Jurisdictional Conference. Annual Conference. District Conference. Charge Conference. Church Conference. And Covenant-Group Conference.

When United Methodists conference, we gather; we fellowship; we pray and worship; and we strive to discuss all our business as substantive matters in theological terms. Again, for United Methodists, conference involves matters of substance. Theological conversation. Even doctrinal instruction. Among United Methodists,

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conference should never be about running away from the substantive, the theological, and the doctrinal. For that reason, according to Dr. Richey, Annual Conference is much, much more than a “trade or labor union for the clergy” that is simply concerned with working conditions and benefits. Annual Conference involves serious theological deliberation about our life together in the Gospel.

### **15. Gnosticism Galore**

There is a modern gnosticism—or overspiritualizing—of human sexuality and of the Church. Refusing to take seriously what God materially creates and builds and sustains in this world, gnosticism rejects everything that gets in the way of the isolated human person deciding and doing whatever that person desires, sexually and ecclesiastically and otherwise. The Gospel stands up and speaks in favor of God’s creation and called people, and opposes spirituality and autonomy run amok.

### **16. Grace Cheapened**

Accountability, in The United Methodist Church today, is nearly impossible. Why? Because “cheap grace” (Bonhoeffer) is readily available at all levels of the church.

### **17. Only by God’s Spirit**

Dr. Abraham noted that neither “the cult of John Wesley” nor “respect for Albert Outler” will be enough to get The United Methodist Church through this difficult time. Only the power of the Holy Spirit, leading The United Methodist Church back to its source (the Bible understood with the help of the Wesleyan Tradition, which opens up the assistance of The Great Tradition of the Church catholic), and working on United Methodists in our various conferences, can do that. There is reason for hope—not optimism—among United Methodists. But that hope must be in the presence and power of the Triune God.

### **18. Unsettled?**

Bishop Bill McAlilly—who was accused of trying to lead, by hand gestures, the 2016 General Conference to vote in a certain way—said that he was recently asked: “What are your hopes for the special, called General Conference in 2019?” He understandably replied, “That I will not be asked to preside.” Belly laughs followed.

In a devotion, Bp. McAlilly spoke about how “unsettled” he is—and many are—in The United Methodist Church today. Everybody gets that. But it seems

Christians tend to become more settled when we trust, say, and do what God requires of us-- with God’s help. (See Boniface’s powerful comment at the end of the March 1, 2017 issue of [Lifewatch](#).)

### **19. Diversity**

The United Methodist Church is, and will continue to be, a diverse denomination. The challenge is to achieve a “legitimate diversity” and not adopt a diversity that undercuts all teaching, all tradition, all authority, all order, all rules. Diversity, well understood, can be beautiful for a church. Diversity, thoughtlessly let loose, can bring chaos to a church.

### **20. MEXIT**

Given The United Methodist Church’s present predicament with regard to human sexuality, what then should we do? Dr. Abraham, always the provocateur, suggested the special General Conference should approve what might be called MEXIT. Yes, MEXIT—as opposed to BREXIT. In Abraham’s MEXIT proposal, the church’s current doctrine and discipline should be more or less kept in place, and those who cannot abide by them should be allowed to leave the church without penalty. After fifty years of failing to persuade United Methodists of the truth of their cause, progressives owe it to the larger church to leave. Furthermore, those who leave could embark upon a theological project to explain “gay consciousness” and its ramifications to the church they have left, to the churches in general, and to the greater society. Also, those who depart would be welcome occasionally to work with The United Methodist Church to accomplish various outreach projects around the world.

Dr. Abraham was concerned that the called General Conference might favor a third way, might maximize the choices of conferences, congregations, and clergy. According to Abraham, if General Conference votes to blaze a third way, The United Methodist Church could end up looking like a “United Methodist Council of Churches” (UMCC). UMCC would contain three United Methodist communities—one for progressives, one for moderates, and one for orthodox. Here a most serious question arises: would the UMCC be Church or not? Stated differently, would the UMCC, lacking common doctrine and discipline, disqualify itself from being Church?

Admittedly, I did not stay for the entire colloquy. Nor did I attend all the “small groups” of scholars/participants at which their papers were presented and discussed. But I observed enough of the event to sample its best fare. As the above report makes clear, this colloquy always forced this observer to think about what a faithful future for The United Methodist Church might be. Such a future will only be possible by God’s providence, by God pouring out the Holy Spirit on United Methodists to live in Christian love and to love in Gospel truth. (PTS)♥

## “PETER SAYS NO”—SO SHOULD THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*Please read this long, rather ponderous article to the end—even though you may, while reading, wonder why you are doing so. At essay’s end, you will understand why it is important to us United Methodists. You might even read it a second and a third time.*

*Father John Hunwicke wrote most of the words that follow. According to First Things, Fr. Hunwicke is “a priest of the personal ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham” in England and Wales. A former Anglican, he maintains certain Anglican characteristics as a Roman Catholic priest. His article, “Peter Says No,” appeared on the First Things website on February 7, 2017. (See <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/02/peter-says-no>, accessed on 02/08/17.) In abbreviated form, with my editorial comments provided inside brackets (“[...]”), with extended comments, and with an additional quotation at the very end, this essay may offer assistance to The United Methodist Church—especially the Council of Bishops, the resident bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward, and the special 2019 General Conference—at this most challenging time. (PTS)*

### UNCHANGING CHURCH

“...In...1864, Newman [John Henry Newman, 1801-1890, an English, evangelical Anglican priest who became a great Roman Catholic theologian and cardinal] takes up a criticism leveled against Catholicism—namely, that it is intransigent [or rigid, in today’s lingo]. Rather than denying this charge, he accepts and strengthens it, then characteristically turns it against the [Roman Catholic] Church’s critics: ‘It is one of the reproaches urged against the Church of Rome, that it has originated nothing, and has only served as a sort of remora [hindrance, obstacle, obstruction] or break in the development of doctrine. And it is an objection which I embrace as a truth; for such I conceive to be the main purpose of its extraordinary gift.’ Newman denied that Rome was the site of innovation. He saw that ‘the Church or Rome possessed no great mind in the whole period of persecution,’ nor in the centuries that followed. ‘For a long while, it has not a single doctor [of doctrine] to show: St. Leo, its first, is the teacher of one point of doctrine.’ Just as Peter was not the dazzling originator of new teaching, his successors have more often served as a brake on innovation than as its impetus. [emphasis added]

“Of course, theological creativity is currently much prized....

“Newman believed that the power to impose belief de fide [essential to the Church’s faith] is a weapon in the Church’s armory to be used negatively, as ‘a stern painful necessity,’ when an error has arisen or an ‘impending danger is to be averted.’ He goes so far as to imply that magisterial intervention is ‘improper’ except when there is an error to be condemned or averted. In other words,

the Church behaves most properly when she resists innovation by saying (with St. Paul at Galatians 1:8-9) anathema sit [“let that one be accursed,” NRSV].

...“When the Anglican patristic scholar and Church historian Trevor Jalland concluded his Bampton Lectures at Oxford in 1942 (published in 1944 as The Church and the Papacy: A Historical Study), he spoke of the Roman Church as having ‘in its long and remarkable history a supernatural grandeur which no mere secular institution has ever attained in equal measure,’ and went on to refer to ‘its strange, almost mystical, faithfulness to type, its marked degree of changelessness, its steadfast clinging to tradition and to precedent.’ [emphases in the original] He...link[ed] the Christian Roman faithfulness to Tradition with the pagan Roman appetite for venerable and normative antiquity. We may recall the work of the great Dutch philologist Christine Mohrmann, who demonstrated that the style and idiom of liturgical Latin... was consciously based upon the archaic cultic Latin of the earliest pagan Roman antiquity. In other words, ‘Roman’ means ‘what is authentic because it is old.’...

“When, in the second century, something recognizable as Church History begins to emerge, we find the Roman Church already exercising a negative charism [a powerful gift from the Holy Spirit to be used for the good of the Church] of the exclusion of error. The significant teachers of Christian antiquity were not popes, and the heretical teachers did not spread their innovative perceptions from the city at the center of the world. To quote another Anglican, Dom Gregory Dix [1901-1952, an Anglican priest, monk, and liturgical scholar in England]: ‘To Rome comes Marcion [c. 85-160, taught the heresy that the God of the Old Testament is inconsistent with the God of the New Testament], already under censure in other Churches; but until Rome has condemned him he is still a Catholic Christian. It is at Rome that the controversies with the great Gnostic [heretical belief that matter is evil and spiritual knowledge frees one from matter’s limitations] heresiarchs [those who originate heresy and those who found sects based on heresy], which fill the latter half of the second century, were primarily thrashed out. It is at Rome that the answer to their claim to a secret tradition and a succession of teachers from the Apostles is elaborated; it is at Rome that the additions to the baptismal symbol which exclude their interpretations of the Gospel are first made; it is at Rome that the incompatibility of their Hellenistic presuppositions with the concrete thought of authentic Christianity is made plain.... Above all, in the controversy over Montanus [who, in the second century, led a movement in the Church that believed in new revelations and beliefs, and that promoted pentecostal practice and rigorous morality], about which we know more than any other in this period, Rome is obviously the center and focus of the final issue, even though Montanus never left Asia and the Apostolic Churches of Asia were his chief opponents. It is at Rome

that the Montanists, excommunicated in Asia, repeatedly seek the communion of the Church; at Rome that Praxeas [an anti-Montanist] intervenes against them; at Rome that the Church of Lyons seeks to mediate between them and their opponents; Tertullian the Montanist [155-240, theologian] reserves his wrath, not for the Asian bishops who had excommunicated and sought to exorcise the new Prophets of the Paraclete [Holy Spirit], but for the Roman bishop whose refusal of Communion had finally cut them off from the Church.’ The story is always the same: the testing of some novelty against Tradition; the rejection of the novelty; the formal exclusion from the Church of those who attempted to promote it.” (emphasis added)

### **IS THE HOLY SPIRIT DRIVING THE CHANGE?**

Often in the Roman Catholic Church [and in The United Methodist Church and in other churches] today, the Holy Spirit is claimed to be behind, with, and for changes in doctrine.

...“Perhaps, in their simple and primitive way, the [Church] Fathers of [Church] councils thought it better to repeat the teaching of their predecessors than to co-opt the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the propagation of novelties.”

...“It is well known that the First Vatican Council [1869-1870] defined the doctrines of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff and of his exercise (within certain limited circumstances) of that infallibility with which God had willed to endow His Church. It may be a little less widely recognized that, before doing this, the Fathers very wisely explained what the papal magisterium was actually for. And it is significant how carefully they couched this explanation in negative terms: ‘For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter so that, by His revelation, they might publish new teaching, but so that, by His assistance, they might devoutly guard and faithfully expound the revelation handed down through the Apostles: the Deposit of Faith [II Timothy 1:4 and the Church’s body of revealed truths].’ [emphasis in the original]

...“Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger [later Pope Benedict XVI]...writing primarily but not solely about the liturgy... declared:... ‘The authority of the pope is not unlimited; it is at the service of Tradition, of the Depositum fidei [Deposit of Faith; again, the Church’s apostolic faith from Scripture and Tradition].’”

### **TWO EXAMPLES OF SAYING NO**

“When Peter speaks, he says No. It is true that he also offers words of affirmation, comfort, and encouragement, as all pastors do. But when he exercises the role most typical of the Petrine mystery—the safeguarding of the faith—he speaks in the negative. We see this in two of the most important exercises of the papal magisterium in the years since Vatican II [1962-1965]—indeed, since the Council of Trent [1545-1563]: Humanae vitae [Of Human Life, 1968, Encyclical Letter, which responds to the Sexual Revolution] and Ordinatio

sacerdotalis [Priestly Ordination, 1994, Apostolic Letter, which responds to the request to ordain women to the priesthood]....

“Blessed Paul VI [pope from 1963 until 1978]...saw the crucial importance of the doctrinal questions involved here, and the responsibility was lay upon him as Successor of St. Peter to give a decisive and authoritative ruling. Indeed, the Holy Spirit was given to him so that he might devoutly guard and faithfully expound the teaching handed down through the apostles, the Deposit of Faith. He did not summon synods in which he invited selected bishops to express with Parrhesia [boldness and honesty] whatever views they had. He did not repeatedly suggest that the Holy Spirit might be abroad advocating a change in the established teaching. He did not float an ambiguously worded document in order to create an atmosphere in which those bishops who regarded themselves as closest to the pope’s mind could feel that they had been given sufficient authority to abandon the Tradition. Instead, Paul VI stated: ‘Therefore, having attentively sifted the documentation laid before Us, after mature reflection and assiduous prayers, We now intend, by virtue of the mandate entrusted to Us by Christ, to give Our reply to these grave questions.’ And his reply was a decisive negative [to the proposed innovations in teaching]. It failed to claim the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

“A similar pattern can be seen when John Paul II issued Ordinatio sacerdotalis.... That question was quite simply whether women, interchangeably with men, could receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. And, in a brief magisterial intervention, John Paul II declared that the Church was unable (nullam facultatem habere) [or does not possess the ability] to ordain women....” [John Paul II actually wrote: “Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church’s divine constitution itself, in virtue of my [papal] ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Luke 22:32) I declare that the [Roman Catholic] Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.”]

[Since The United Methodist Church does not teach against the use of contraception and does ordain women, these might appear to be rather odd case studies for a United Methodist to invoke. However, in both cases, the popes involved were simply following the Roman Catholic Church’s faith as received from their Scripture and their Tradition. With regard to United Methodism, we believe the Bible explicitly prohibits neither contraception nor the ordination of women; but The United Methodist Church does believe (and read!) that the Bible unambiguously prohibits homosexual activity. Therefore, The United Methodist Church, for that reason, can and should firmly say No to those promoting its moral acceptance.]

“The witness of Ordinatio sacerdotalis against the culturally mandated dissolution of sexual distinctions is as powerful a defense of Catholic Tradition, and indeed of authentic humanity, as Humanae vitae was. In these two documents, the papal magisterium rendered as significant a service as any pope or council had provided in two millennia. And it did so neither by deploying intellectually stunning arguments, nor by rhetorical strategies involving the Holy Spirit, but simply by saying No; by setting up a barrier against innovation; by saying, This is not what we have received.” [emphasis in the original]

### SO, JUST SAY NO

“In the tragedies of Euripides [480-406 BC, classical Greek playwright], an intractable plot is sometimes brought to a satisfying conclusion by the use of a deus ex machina [god from the machine, or a surprising invention or interruption that overcomes a difficult problem]. Today it is a Spiritus Sanctus ex machina, the use of the Holy Spirit as a piece of cheap machinery to evade perceived inconveniences in inherited Christian teaching. Catholics [and other Christians] seek a different and higher kind of deliverance. In order that we may say Yes to Christ, Peter says No to the world.” [And Peter says No especially to the world that has entered the Church!]

[As The United Methodist Church continues to live with those who are asking the church to morally accept homosexual activity and what goes with it (marriage and ordination), the Council of Bishops, the active bishops, and the members of the Commission on a Way Forward would be wise to read Fr. Hunwicke’s truthful and powerful words above. Obviously, United Methodism does not have a pope who can speak infallibly. But The United Methodist Church does have a Council of Bishops, a Commission on a Way Forward, and a General Conference—all of which can vote, in Hunwicke’s phrase, to “say No”—even if the vote is divided and close.]

[We will close with a strong and hopeful word from Mr. J.D. Flynn, a canon lawyer in Lincoln, NE. In “No Authority over Divine Law,” which appeared on the First Things website on February 16, 2017. (See <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/02-no-authority-over-divine-law>, accessed on 02/17/17.) Mr. Flynn picks up where Fr. Hunwicke leaves off.]

“Those who perceive the Church’s authority is limited also understand that grace has no bounds at all. Grace can redeem all sinners. Grace can set captives free. Grace can strengthen us for the profound difficulty of living according to truth. Grace can make each one of us saints.

“What Christ’s Church binds on earth is bound in heaven, what she loosens is eternally loosed. [Matthew 16:19 and 18:18] But the Church cannot act contrary to revelation. She cannot upend truth, and call it mercy. [emphasis added] She has authority [to release the

faithful from the Lenten fasting regulations governing] corned beef and Guinness [on St. Patrick’s Day], but no such authority over the bread of life.” (PTS)♥

### YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Your support for the witness of Lifewatch—including your prayers, your notes and letters, and your financial gifts—is essential to sustain our witness for the Gospel of Life in The United Methodist Church and beyond.

Remember that a gift to Lifewatch can be given in three ways. First, you can send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. Second, you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. Third, if you are over the age of 70-1/2, you can 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 can count toward your minimum required distribution without being considered as taxable income.) If you are contemplating an IRA gift, please first communicate with Mrs. Evans in the Lifewatch office. And know that Mrs. Evans and I are sincerely grateful for your steadfast support of all kinds. (PTS)

- For years and years, Lifewatch has been fortunate to participate in the National Pro-Life Religious Council (NPRC). NPRC now publishes its quarterly newsletter, “Uniting for Life,” online. You can find the current newsletter, and much more, at [www.nprcouncil.org](http://www.nprcouncil.org).

- On the morning of January 27, walking down Constitution Avenue toward the March for Life gathering at the Washington Monument, Rev. Paul Crikelair, Dr. Phil Hardt, and your scribe were approached by a man who seemed a bit agitated. He mentioned that he did not have a strong personal position on abortion. But he went on to express deep concern about the large screen across the street that was showing grisly pictures and videos of what happened to unborn children in abortions. He responded, “Those pictures are disgusting and repulsive. It seems to me that they would not encourage people to march for life.” Your scribe replied, “While I strongly believe in protecting unborn children and their mothers from abortion, I am not a fan of using gruesome pictures to persuade others to join the pro-life side.” After this brief conversation, he went his way, and I caught up with my two friends to complete our journey to the massive March for Life assembly.

A few days later, Live Action News reported that during the March for Life two young men and a young woman, in counter-protest, were carrying pro-choice signs. They reached the point in the march, on Constitution Avenue, where the pictures and videos of aborted child were on display. The young woman evidently saw the horrible images, stopped, set aside her



**Lifewatch**  
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United Methodists on  
Abortion and Sexuality

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06/01/17

- \* The Unity of the Church and Human Sexuality: A Colloquy at Candler School of Theology
- \* Eric Metaxas at the March for Life

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pro-choice sign, began to cry, and picked up a pro-life sign. Left behind by her colleagues, she was soon surrounded by some pro-life folks who offered her loving support. It must have been one of those instantaneous conversions. (See "Abortion Activist Drops 'Pro-choice' Sign, Joins Pro-life Side during March for Life" by Nancy Flanders, February 7, 2017, <http://liveactionnews.org/abortion-activist-drops-pro-choice-sign-joins-pro-life-side-during-march-for-life/>, accessed on 02/11/17.)

Perhaps those horrendous images can, after all, do something beautiful.

- A Myrtle Beach, SC firefighter, working with his station's medical unit, was called to the scene of an imminent delivery in 2011. He helped the woman in labor into the ambulance. After delivering the child, he then accompanied the mother and her newborn to a local hospital. At the hospital, hearing the nurses mention that the child would be put up for adoption, he asked that his name be added to the list of potential adoptive parents. Within a couple of days, the little one was received into the home of the "deliveryman," his wife, and their two sons. Rebecca Grace Hadden, or "Gracie," was indeed blessed by her "daddy," Marc Hadden—and by her unnamed mother. (See "SC Fireman Adopts Baby Girl He Delivered on Emergency Call" by Jennifer Earl, February 11, 2017, [http://www.wbir.com/news/local/sc-fireman-adopts-baby-girl-he-](http://www.wbir.com/news/local/sc-fireman-adopts-baby-girl-he-delivered-on-emergency-call/)

delivered-on-emergency-call/407065133, accessed on 01/12/17.)

- A copy of "A Disunited Methodist Church" by your editor, which appeared in the May 2017 issue of First Things, is enclosed in this newsletter. Know that First Things is the most excellent, substantive journal on religion and public life that is available today. Consider a subscription. (I am encouraged that so many United Methodists regularly read it.)

- Responding to the last issue of Lifewatch, a friend wrote to mention he was glad to read our positive reflections on the Vigil Mass the night before the 2017 Lifewatch Service of Worship and the 2017 March for Life. "But," he noted, "we'll have to get you and Rev. Crikelair better places [to sit during the worship service]. Maybe up in the sanctuary with those representatives of Ancient Churches of the East!" Thanks. But perhaps that would not be the best ecumenical fit.

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

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