

A CHURCH OF THE WORLD OR A CHURCH OF THE WORD?

That is the question confronting United Methodism's General Conference 2016. And that is the question General Conference 2016, at its conclusion, will have answered. Through the many decisions it will have made, General Conference will have led The United Methodist Church to follow the world or the Word or a confusing mix of the two. Please read, study, consider, and apply the following sermon, and pray for General Conference 2016 and The United Methodist Church. (PTS)

by **The Reverend Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Exodus 32:1-7, 15, 19ff., and 30-34

Priest against prophet, worldly church against the church of faith, the church of Aaron against the church of Moses -- this is the eternal conflict in the church of Christ. And it is this conflict and its resolution that we are to consider today.

Moses and Aaron, the two brothers, of the same tribe, of the same blood, sharing the same history, going for part of the way side by side -- then wrenched apart. Moses, the first prophet, Aaron, the first priest; Moses, called of God, chosen without regard of his person, the man who was slow of tongue, the servant of God, living solely to hear the Word of his Lord; Aaron, the man with the purple robe and the holy diadem, the consecrated and sanctified priest, who must maintain his service of God for the people. And now, in our story: Moses called alone into the presence of the living God, high above on the mount of fear, between life and death in the thunder and lightning, to receive the law of the covenant of God with his people -- and there down below in the valley, the people of Israel with the priest in his purple robe, sacrificing, far from God.

Why must Moses and Aaron be in conflict? Why cannot they stand side by side in the same service? Why must the church of Moses and the church of Aaron, the church of the Word and the worldly church break apart time and again? The answer to the question is given in our text.

Moses is called up the mountain by God for his people. It is God's will to speak with him up there. The children of Israel know that. They know that up there Moses is standing, fighting, praying, suffering for them. He wears no purple robe, he is no priest; he is nothing at all, nothing but the servant who waits on the Word of his Lord, gets sick, tormented when he is not allowed to hear this word. He is nothing -- nothing but the prophet of his God. But the church of Aaron, the church of the world cannot wait. It is impatient. Where has Moses gone? Why does he not come back? Perhaps we will not see him again. Where is he, with his God? "As for this Moses...we do not know what has become of him." It may be that he no longer exists, that he is dead.

These are the questions which the church of Aaron, at all times puts to the church of the Word. "We cannot see it. Where are its works? What is its contribution? No doubt at all, it is dead." Do we not then understand that perhaps God himself is keeping Moses up on the mountain, that he is not yet letting him go because he still has something to say to him? Do we not understand that perhaps even today he is not yet letting the church of Moses go, the church whose wish is to hear only the Word of God, because he has still something to say in the quietness? Even God needs time with his prophet and with his church. Is it for us to be impatient? Certainly, the church of the Word is once again on Sinai, and in fear and trembling, amidst the thunder and lightning, withstands the Word of God, waits, believes, prays, fights....For whom? For the church of Aaron, for the church down there in the valley, for the worldly church. The unwillingness of the worldly church to wait, its impatience, is the first stage of its clash with the church of the Word. So it has always been, and so it will continue to be.

"As for this Moses...we do not know what has become of him. Arise, Aaron, make us gods, who shall go before us." That is the second stage, which follows immediately upon the first. The worldly church, the church of the priests, wants to see something. Now it wants to wait no longer. It wants to go to work by itself, act by itself, do by itself what God and the prophets are not doing. What is the use of the priest, what is the use of the church, if they are only left to wait? No, our church ought to have something. We want to see something in our church. We do not want to wait. You priests, you are sanctified, you are

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

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consecrated. You owe us something. Arise, Aaron the priest, do your duty, attend to the divine service. God has left us, but we need gods. We need religions. If you cannot prevail with the Living God, make us gods yourself!

The concern expressed here is really not as bad as all that. It is even a pious concern. People are not saying, "Away with the gods!" but "We need gods, religions; make us some!" The priest is not driven out; he is told, "Do your duty!" "Preserve religion for the people, give them worship services." They really want to remain a church with gods and priests and religion, but a church of Aaron -- without God. And Aaron yields. He looks to his office, to his consecration; he looks to the people. He understands their impatience, their thirst for action, and their pious raging only too well -- and he yields. Come, you who have been abandoned by your God and by your prophet, make yourselves a god who will not leave you again, more splendid, more glorious than the God who has left us. Bring precious jewelry, gold, necklaces, and bracelets, bring it as an offering. And they will all come, without exception. They bring their precious offering to their own image of their god. They tear the jewelry from their bodies and throw it into the glowing mass from which Aaron now shapes the glittering, monstrous, golden calf.

We hear it said that the people are not so ready for sacrifice. But those who talk like this do not know the world. The human race is ready for any sacrifice in which it may celebrate itself and worship its own work. The worldly church, the church of Aaron, is ready for any sacrifice if it is to be allowed to make its own god. The human race and the worldly church fall on their knees joyfully, and with smiles, before the god whom we make as it pleases us. But *God* finds little readiness for sacrifice. No, the church of Aaron does not stint, it is not mean, it is lavish with its god. Everything that is precious and valuable and holy to it is cast into the glowing fire of the ideal. Everyone must contribute to the glorification of the god, so each one, according to his inclinations and his capabilities, throws his own ideals into the melting pot -- and then the orgy begins. The worldly church celebrates its triumph, the priest has shown his power, and now he himself stands in the middle in his purple robe and his holy diadem and worships the creation of his own hand. And round him the people prostrate themselves in ecstasy and look up at the god whom they have made in their own strength, at their own sacrifice. Who would want to stand aside from this pious joy, this unparalleled exuberance, this achievement of human will and ability? The worldly church now has its god, come, sacrifice to enjoy yourselves, play, eat, drink, dance, make money, be thrilled by the spectacle! You have a god again. These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! Come, behold, worship!

But there are rumblings on Sinai. For God shows Moses his faithless people. And Moses trembles for his people and comes hastily down from the mountain. He already hears the merrymaking and the shouts of the dance and the tumult and the orgy. He already sees his brother in purple robe and holy diadem, and in the midst of the golden god of the worldly church, the worldly god, the god of the priests, the god who is no God. There he stands among them, the unexpected prophet, high in his hands he swings the tables of the law, and they all must see it, the writing engraved by the hand of God. "I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me!" Dumb terror, dismay, seizes the worldly church at the sight. The party is over. The living God has come amongst them, he rages against them. What will happen? There -- a sight unequalled, a fearful moment -- and the tables of the law lie shattered on the idol, and the idol itself is broken in pieces and consumed. That is the end of the worldly church. God has appointed it. God has remained Lord. Lord, have mercy...!

Church of the priests against church of the Word, church of Aaron against church of Moses -- this historical clash at the foot of Sinai, the end of the worldly church and the appearance of the Word of God repeats itself in our church, day by day, Sunday by

Sunday. Time and again we come together for worship as a worldly church, as a church which will not wait, which will not live from the invisible; as a church which makes its own gods; as a church which wants to have the sort of god which pleases it and will not ask how it pleases God; as a church which wants to do by itself what God will not do; as a church which is ready for any sacrifice in the cause of idolatry, in the cause of the divinization of human thoughts and values; as a church which appropriates to itself divine authority in the priesthood. And we should go away again as a church whose idol lies shattered and destroyed on the ground, as a church which must hear afresh, "I am the Lord your God..." as a church which is humbled as it is faced with this Word, as the church of Moses, the church of the Word. The impatient church becomes the quietly waiting church, the church anxious to see sights becomes the church of sober faith, the church which makes its own gods becomes the church which worships the One God. Will this church too find such devotion, such sacrifice?

But the rupture is not the end. Once again Moses climbs the mountain, this time to pray for his people. He offers up himself, "Reject me with my people, for we are still one. Lord, I love my brother." But God's answer remains dark, fearful, threatening. Moses could not make expiation. Who makes expiation here? It is none other than he who is priest and prophet in one, the man with the purple robe and the crown of thorns, the crucified Son of the Father, who stands before God to make intercession for us. Here, in his cross, there is an end of all idolatry. Here, the

"They really want to remain a church with gods and priests and religion, but a church of Aaron — without God. And Aaron yields."

whole human race, the whole church, is judged and pardoned. Here, God is wholly the God who will have no other god before him, but now also wholly God in that he forgives without limit. As the church which is always at the same time the church of Moses and the church of Aaron, we point to this cross and say, "This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of slavery and will lead you evermore. Come, believe, worship!" Amen.

Dr. Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a Lutheran pastor and theologian, preached the above sermon at Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin, Germany on May 28, 1933. Bonhoeffer's sermon confronted the German churches, as they were tempted to make peace with the world, with National Socialism. This English version of the sermon is from an outstanding collection of Bonhoeffer's works -- A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (HarperSanFrancisco, 1990, and HarperOne 2009) -- edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson.

The question that Dr. Bonhoeffer poses in this sermon must be answered by churches -- congregations and denominations -- every day of their lives, no matter what their locations in history and geography, no matter what the challenges confronting them. As noted above, Dr. Bonhoeffer's question now confronts and challenges General Conference 2016 and The United Methodist Church in a particularly acute way. (PTS) ♥

A PRO-LIFE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM: THE GIFT AND THE GOODNESS OF LIFE

During the third week of September, the 2015 World Meeting of Families took place in Philadelphia, PA. You will remember that, during his recent American visit, Pope Francis stopped in Philadelphia to address that meeting.

On September 23, a Pro-Life International Symposium was held within the context of the World Meeting of Families -- that is, in the Philadelphia Convention Center. Since the Symposium was open to the public, your scribe and his wife, Marsha, were most eager and quite honored to attend. The Symposium featured several brief speeches and a few videos, all of which emphasized the gift and the goodness of human life. What follows are memorable comments that emerged from the Symposium.

Father Terry Gensemer, of the Communion of the Charismatic Episcopal Church, challenged the hundreds assembled in the Grand Ballroom to "be not afraid" (Luke 12:4 and others) of today's culture of death, as Blessed John Paul II often challenged. According to Fr. Gensemer, the recent videos of Planned Parenthood executives discussing the distribution of fetal body parts had brought a shocking "revelation" to American society. The videos had

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**YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND
THESE ANNUAL EVENTS,
WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE
ON JANUARY 22, 2016 (FRIDAY),
AT THE UNITED METHODIST BUILDING
100 MARYLAND AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

9:30 a.m. LIFEWATCH SERVICE OF WORSHIP

Dr. Thomas C. Oden

General Editor of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture,
General Editor of the Ancient Christian Doctrine Series,
Director of the Center for Early African Christianity
at Eastern University in Pennsylvania, and
former Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology and Ethics
at Drew University's Theological School
HAS WRITTEN THE SERMON TO BE PRESENTED BY
ANOTHER

3:00 p.m. LIFEWATCH BOARD MEETING

* * *

ORGANIZE A GROUP FROM YOUR CHURCH TO ATTEND!

opened a box, so to speak, to show dead unborn children. Pro-life people, said Fr. Gensemer, have known what it is in that box for a long time. He continued, "Wish I did not know. It would make my life easier."

Father Frank Pavone, the national director of Priests for Life and the president of the National Pro-Life Religious Council (NPRC, the ecumenical organization to which Lifewatch belongs) noted a common moral hypocrisy in American politics. Those who stand in "solidarity with the poor and the marginalized" are often and unfortunately those who defend and promote the choice to destroy the most vulnerable, the unborn child. If politicians and citizens promote social justice, peace, non-violence, equality, and solidarity, they must begin with care for the unborn, Fr. Pavone asserted. Also, as Pope Francis has made clear, concern for the environment includes care for the unborn child. Furthermore, mercy involves not only the forgiveness of sins but also the deliverance of the helpless.

Dr. Alveda King, a niece of the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., serves as the director of African-American Outreach at Priests for Life and is the author of King Rules: Ten Truths for You, Your Family, and Our Nation to Prosper (Nelson Books, 2015). She declared that her uncle, MLK, was most definitely pro-life during his years of ministry. She also recalled that abortion continues to be disproportionately common in the African-American community. This led her to say, "America will not reject abortion until it sees abortion."

"This Is My Body," a beautiful six-minute video available on YouTube, was then shown. That simple sentence, "This is my body," is used not only by our Lord as He gives Himself to His Church in Holy Communion (Matthew 26:26 and the Communion liturgy) but also by

those who demand abortion. Starkly contrasting the moral visions of sacrifice and selfishness, the video ends with: "A sacrifice of love for you." "Life. What a beautiful choice."

Astrid Bennett Gutierrez works for Hispanics for Life. She noted that around one-fourth of all abortions in the United States involve Hispanic women and their unborn children. Their abortion rate is twice that of Caucasians. Also, she reminded her listeners that most abortion clinics are within walking distance of minority neighborhoods.

Kathy DiFiore is the founder of Several Sources Shelters, which is depicted in the film "Gimme Shelter." In a memorable presentation, she displayed pictures of babies saved from abortion and pictures of the same people as grade schoolers, teens, and young adults. God's providence was behind their hopeful faces, their promising smiles.

An Hispanic woman who appeared in the 2012 film "For Greater Glory" retold the story of her father's

death. He lay dying of cancer in a hospital room. His doctor advised his family to remove the oxygen mask. On the basis of the Church's teaching on protecting the vulnerable, the family refused. That allowed time for her mother to be called to the hospital. When she finally arrived, he apologized to her for his wrongdoing in the past, let go of his life, and died from the cancer. This was a parable about God's timing, not ours. She also noted that, for her, relationship with Jesus Christ most definitely involves frequent participation in Holy Communion. John Wesley would agree.

Kevin Burke, of Rachel's Vineyard, noted that while abortion is never the will of God, it can be a "happy fault" since it can lead people to repentance and reconciliation with God and neighbor. Also, he indicated that an abortion sends forth many shock waves -- to parents, families, neighborhoods, churches, schools, and so on. On healing these shock waves of abortion, see www.silentnomoreawareness.org/shockwaves/.

Steven Bozza, of the Respect Life Office of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, proudly declared that "Philadelphia stands for life." That was dramatically proven by the way the city responded to the crimes of Kermit Gosnell, the infamous abortionist. October 24, 2015 was named a National Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Gosnell's Clinic.

All who attended the Symposium left better informed and greatly inspired. Due to the grace of God, this information and inspiration are now being translated into witness for the Gospel, gift, and goodness of human life. (PTS) ♥

RCRC BACKS PLANNED PARENTHOOD

You know about the videos that reveal Planned Parenthood executives discussing the donation or sale of body parts of aborted children to various businesses. Though filmed under false pretenses, these videos have created concern across the United States -- probably even among some "pro-choice" folks -- about Planned Parenthood's work. As various governmental investigations of Planned Parenthood unfold, there is a growing movement to stop granting nearly half a billion federal dollars to the organization (which is the largest abortion provider in American society) each year.

For your information, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) signed an August 3, 2015 letter, to United States Senators, which supports continued federal funding of Planned Parenthood. You will recall that two United Methodist bodies -- the General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women -- affiliate with RCRC.

After repeating the alleged medical good that Planned Parenthood provides for "women and their families," and attempting to demonize "antiabortion extremists" who would dare to pull the curtain back on some of Planned Parenthood's activities, the letter concludes with this paragraph: "As organizations of faith, we stand with Planned Parenthood. As members of Congress committed to supporting the health and well-being of your constituents, we urge you to do the same." (Though the grammatical misconstruction of the second sentence suggests that those who signed the letter are "members of Congress," you get the idea. Forgive the snark.)

So what? Well, Planned Parenthood is exposed in committing immoral and possibly illegal deeds. Nevertheless, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice stands with Planned Parenthood. Since the General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women affiliate with RCRC, these two United Methodist bodies also stand with Planned Parenthood. And most problematically, since the General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women are a part of The United Methodist Church, The United Methodist Church, indirectly and by association, stands with Planned Parenthood -- at least until the General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women raise serious concerns about what Planned Parenthood is apparently doing.

On this matter, as others, moral clarity requires honesty about The United Methodist Church's organizational connections and accountability (or the lack thereof). Such moral clarity invites the General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women to stand against the odious practices of Planned Parenthood and RCRC's complicity. (PTS) ♥

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TIME FOR COVENANT LOVE

Dr. Riley Case is a United Methodist pastor in Indiana. For The Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church, he writes editorials under the banner "Happenings around the Church." Dr. Case's editorials are filled with interesting and relevant historical information, solid evangelical theology, and sound reasoning. His August 7, 2015 editorial -- entitled "Love, Faithfulness, and United Methodist Covenants" -- is a good word to United Methodists.

Dr. Case's August 2015 editorial wisely takes the word love and describes it in covenantal terms. According to Case, love for Christians and the Church is strongly related to the Old Testament's hesed (or steadfast love) and the New Testament's agape (or sacrificial love). "So, in Bible times, and in many respects, even today," Case writes, "covenant love is much more than feelings and likes and inclinations. It is faithful response within the vows and promises [of covenants] and contracts and agreements that make up everyday life.... In marriage we take vows of faithfulness. Those vows preclude any possibility of adultery. To violate the vow is to betray love."

Dr. Case goes on to list covenants that relate to the Church today -- the Mosaic Covenant and its Ten Commandments, and the New Covenant with Christ crucified for the salvation of the world. Curiously, he does not explicitly mention The Baptismal Covenant into which baptized Christians, including United Methodists, enter through God's gifts of water and the Spirit.

Why, exactly, is the covenant love required by The Baptismal Covenant so important to us United Methodists today? Because in our day, love for The United Methodist Church often does not arise naturally. It is a challenging time to be a United Methodist Christian. Still, according to the fifth vow of The Baptismal Covenant, we promise to be "loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church, and do all in [our] power to strengthen its ministries" -- even when that loyalty and service are difficult. That requires covenant love, the kind of covenant love that Dr. Case, in his editorial, so boldly and beautifully depicts. That covenant love leads bishops, pastors, professors, and laity to loyalty and service that are willing to stand up and teach the true meaning of Christian marriage and sexual morals - - even in a denomination that is experiencing widespread dissent on those subjects. Again, our covenant love -- which is gracefully based on God's covenant love for the Church -- is required for faithfulness. Our exercise of covenant love is difficult, but it is possible with God's help.

Dr. Riley Case, keep up your thoughtful work! (PTS)

WHAT KIND OF UNITY?

In the midst of differences, tensions, and divisions in The United Methodist Church, some of which are articulated and some not, the question arises: To what kind

of unity should all United Methodists, clergy and laity, aspire?

That question -- or one like it -- has been asked often over the last several years. When asked, it provokes some predictable answers.

The most "spiritual" reply is: "Our unity is in Jesus Christ." However and unfortunately, among United Methodists today, there is limited unity in our understanding of the person and the work of Jesus Christ. We cannot ground the unity of The United Methodist Church in a person who is not commonly understood.

Another reply to the question, To what kind of unity should all United Methodists aspire?, is: "Our unity is in doctrine." That well intentioned reply seems overly cerebral and rationalistic, and therefore not particularly Wesleyan. Another problem is that, in The United Methodist Church, there seems to be no constant and consistent voice for doctrine -- either to state and teach doctrine or to weigh the many competing, conflicting doctrinal claims. For these reasons, unfortunately, doctrine cannot advance unity in the church today.

A third response to, What kind of unity?, is: "Our unity is in Christian morality as stated by Scripture." But that is exactly where organized dissent now is testing the church's teaching. Since denominational division now results from the lack of a common moral vision, we are unwise to believe that we can pin our hopes on unifying around Biblical moral teaching.

A fourth response to the question, To what kind of unity should all United Methodists aspire?, was coined by Mr. John Lomperis last August. In an email, he used the phrase "covenantal unity." Yes, that is the unity to which all United Methodists can and should aspire. Covenantal unity.

Jesus Christ works through The Baptismal Covenant to sustain the life, faith, and faithfulness of The United Methodist Church. In response to Christ's faithful covenant love (see the prior article), United Methodists strive to keep The Baptismal Covenant, and that leads to The United Methodist Church being unified in The Baptismal Covenant. So, in response to Christ's covenant love, we seek covenantal unity by being faithful to the covenant into which we have been baptized. So covenantal unity is the kind of unity we seek.

The covenantal unity of The United Methodist Church is not administratively tidy and certainly not organizationally perfect. It does not involve unanimity. It requires working through disagreements. It is like a marriage, with the help of the covenant of Christian marriage, that is sustained and elevated by God's covenant love through the years. That is a morally and theologically attractive achievement. A church, sustained by The Baptismal Covenant and accompanying amazing grace, is similarly admirable.

Covenantal unity. That is God's gift to, and our task in, The United Methodist Church today.

Mr. Lomperis, thanks for the phrase. (PTS)

STAYING AFTER SCHISM

The Reverend Dr. Paul T. Hinlicky is a friend of many years. He is a Lutheran, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), the Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies at Roanoke College in Salem, VA, and the author of the recently published Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom (Eerdmans, 2015).

Dr. Hinlicky's thoughtful article, "After Schism," appeared in the Summer 2015 issue of Lutheran Forum. It laments what has happened in the ELCA since it became more choice- and local-option-oriented on matters related to human sexuality and marriage.

In "After Schism," Hinlicky admits that he has borrowed language from the Church Struggle in Germany during the 1930s. "To be precise about this borrowing: I do *not* think that the predominant theology in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is Nazism, which equation would be an insult to those who really suffered under real Nazism. But I *do* think that our American Christian progressives -- an approach that Bonhoeffer described as 'Protestantism without Reformation,' and that has prevailed in the ELCA -- theologize in ways significantly parallel to the German Christian party of that time. Wanting desperately to be on the right side of history, as if history were God, the German Christians were quite willing to sacrifice the tradition of the gospel as embodied in Holy Scripture for some new thing that they thought the Spirit was doing [that is, National Socialism]. I continue to find this parallel disturbing..."

Dr. Hinlicky declares why he stays in the ELCA. His reasons appear close to the gospel and God's will: "Hoping against hope, as Christians must, I nevertheless remain a pastor in the ELCA, where the Lord has placed me in a meaningful call for purposes mostly beyond my comprehension. As through a glass but dimly, I see staying as a way of holding the institutions to account, supporting the dissenters who remain, nurturing growing doubt about the sacred cows of the ELCA among those who are not yet open dissenters, and keeping a principled commitment not to repeat Luther's error of demonizing theological opponents but rather to practice the Christian ethic of enemy love -- which at times will take the form of sharp, rational critique of my sisters and brothers who ought to know better, treating them as church even when they do not act as church. So I will dissent in place until I am forced to shelter elsewhere."

In a more recent comment, Dr. Hinlicky promises: "I will by the grace of God...continue 'narrowly' to focus in the Spirit on Jesus as the Son of His heavenly Father, treating the gospel of cheap grace that today prevails in the ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, his church] as the distraction from the cause of the gospel that it has become, so help me God." ("Responding to My Interlocutors," Forum Letter, October 2015, pp. 6-7)

Prayerfully think long and hard about Dr. Hinlicky's words. Thank you. (PTS) ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- The United Methodist Church does not financially support Lifewatch. Therefore, we are especially thankful to you for remembering Lifewatch in your prayers and with your gifts -- especially as General Conference 2016 approaches. A gift to Lifewatch can be given in two ways. You can send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. And you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. Lifewatch is most grateful for your prayers and for your financial support.

- David and Jeanie Stanley -- of Muscatine, Iowa -- were faithful, long-time friends of Lifewatch. They recently died -- first Jeanie, then David a few weeks later. They were people of deep and great faith in Jesus Christ, and they were United Methodists through and through. Their faith found expression in good works, in thoughtful service, and in regular generosity. Dedicated to renewal ministries in The United Methodist Church, the Stanley's were also active in more local ministries, marriage renewal, and politics. Thanks be to God for the lives of David and Jeanie Stanley, and for their faith in Jesus Christ, their faithfulness to The United Methodist Church, and their countless good deeds.

- It is no secret that Lifewatch favors maintaining the covenant of The United Methodist Church. And it is no secret that that covenant needs to be strengthened.

Therefore, we gladly point to TheCUPlan: A Covenantal Unity Plan and its six (6) proposals that will be considered by General Conference 2016. Read about it at <http://covenantalunity.org/>, and be encouraged. For your information, Dr. Billy Abraham of Perkins School of Theology (SMU), Dr. Bill Arnold of Asbury Theological Seminary, and Dr. David Watson of United Theological Seminary are the initiators of TheCUPlan.

- Perhaps we should call this the Lutheran special edition of Lifewatch. First Bonhoeffer. Then Hinlicky. Now, Pastor Matthew C. Harrison and Hermann Sasse.

Pastor Harrison is the president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. His official, denominational statement on the United States Supreme Court's decision, that legally redefines marriage, appears in Forum Letter (August 2015, p. 6). Pr. Harrison's critical statement includes this quotation from Hermann Sasse (1895-1976, a Lutheran theologian): "The Caesar cult in its manifold forms, the deification of the state, is one great form of the defection from the [true] idea of the state. There are also other possibilities of such defection. The government can forget and neglect its tasks. When it no longer distinguishes between right and wrong, when its courts are no longer governed by the strict desire for justice, but by special interests, when government no longer has the courage to exercise its law, fails to exercise its duties, undermines its own legal order, when it weakens through its family law parental authority and the estate of marriage, then it ceases to be governing authority.

"Raising such a question can lead to heavy conflicts of conscience. But it is fundamentally conceivable, and it has time and again become reality in history, that a governing

authority has ceased to be governing authority. In such a case there may indeed exist submission to a superior power. But the duty of obedience against this power no longer exists.” (“What Is the State?,” 1932)

Sasse’s words were, of course, written in response to the rise of National Socialism in Germany in the 1930s. They are a strong reminder that Christians and the Church are not called to approve automatically everything the State says and does. They keep us United Methodist Christians awake to the perils, potential and actual, of our time and place.

- Here is yet another Lutheran contribution.

Dr. James I. Lamb is the executive director of Lutherans for Life. Recently, he noted: “Think about it. We have some shocking news. ‘God became a speck, an embryo in a fallopian tube!’ ‘God was born!’ ‘God lived as a friend of sinners!’ ‘God embraced dirty, smelly sinners!’ ‘God suffered for unlovable and unloving sinners!’ ‘God died!’ ‘God rose again!’ ‘God wins!’ ‘Sin, death, Satan defeated!’ ‘God reigns over all!’

“That’s the most positive and powerful shocking For Life news I can think of. As I love to say, it is tailor made for these issues of life and death, pain and suffering, grief and regret. Have you been shocked by the Planned Parenthood news and the ongoing tragedy of abortion? If so, good for you! Have you been shocked by the Good News of God’s great love For Life? If so, even better for you!... We [at Lutherans for Life] do not want the shock wave of the Gospel of Life to ever become a ripple.” (“Shock Waves to Ripples,” LifeDate, Fall 2015, p. 3)

- One last word from the world of Lutheranism. This is from Dr. Ryan C. MacPherson, who teaches at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN: “In addition to His

Word, God has given the gift of natural law. Written in the hearts of all people is God’s design for human nature. Deep within the human conscience, reality talks back, reducing to silence the postmodern claim that morality is whatever anybody wants it to be. After all, if abortion really was okay, then why do women (and the men in their lives) suffer so much trauma from the guilt of it? And if homosexual relationships really were so wholesome, then why, again, is homosexual behavior correlated so strongly with debilitating diseases and significantly shortened lifespans? Why, indeed, have LGBTQ activists worked so relentlessly to compel the entire nation to affirm them, forcing florists and photographers to cater to same-sex celebrations in affirmation of the new ‘morality?’

“Clearly, all sinners’ consciences bother them and will continue to do so until one of two things happens: they silence their conscience by coercing an entire civilization to affirm their self-made ‘morality;’ or, they collapse at the foot of the cross to receive forgiveness from the One who truly did invent morality and, just as truly, fulfilled all righteousness for their sakes as much as for yours and mine. In the end, the debate is not really about abortion or homosexuality or even postmodernism. The literal ‘crux’ of the matter is the Cross: do we attempt to justify ourselves by redefining morality to fit our lifestyles, or do we regard ourselves as sinners in need of Christ’s forgiveness and ask Him to send His Holy Spirit so that we may [be] empowered to live a new kind of life?” (“Postmodern Morality: Attacking God’s Standards for Marriage and Procreation,” LifeDate, Fall 2015, p. 10)

- Rev. Laura Young is a United Methodist pastor who directs the Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. On October 8, she participated in the public blessing of an abortion clinic, Preterm, in Cleveland, OH.

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Fr. Frank Pavone, the president of NPRC (as noted above), responded: "For clergy to bless an abortion clinic is contrary to the two central commands of the Christian faith -- to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love each other as ourselves." We cannot claim to love God or each other by helping those who kill our brothers and sisters."

"Moreover, this breaks the commandment *You shall not use the name of the Lord your God in vain*. This commandment does not only prohibit cursing by invoking God's name. It also prohibits blessing in God's name that which God abhors.

"Not only does this contradict Christian teaching, but it impedes the healing of those who suffer after their abortion. After all, why ask forgiveness or feel bad about an action the Church blesses? The result, however, is not that these individuals stop feeling pain; it is that they feel ashamed to ask for forgiveness, and feel silly for feeling sad."

Fr. Pavone speaks words of truth and love about the so-called blessing of an abortion clinic.

- This prayer was written for the 2015 World Meeting of Families, which took place last September in Philadelphia: "God and Father of us all, in Jesus, your Son and our Savior, you have made us your sons and daughters in the family of the Church. May your grace and love help our families in every part of the world be united to one another in fidelity to the Gospel. May the example of the Holy Family, with the aid of your Holy Spirit, guide all families, especially those most troubled, to be homes of communion and prayer and to always seek your truth and live in your love. Through Christ our

Lord. Amen." (Love Is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive, Our Sunday Visitor, p. 117; this is a wonderful, inspiring study book.)

- "Some will suggest that a Christian sexual ethic puts the churches on the 'wrong side of history.' Well, we've been on the wrong side of history since A.D. 33. The 'right side of history' was the Eternal City of Rome. And then the right side of history was the French Revolution. And then the right side of history was scientific naturalism and state socialism. And yet, there stands Jesus still, on the wrong side of history but at the right hand of the Father." This powerful reminder is from Dr. Russell D. Moore, who is the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is from his article "Evangelicals Won't Cave," which appears in the October 2015 issue of First Things.

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

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