

AN ELECTION DAY PRAYER

Sovereign Lord, foolish we are, believing that we can rule ourselves by selecting this or that person to rule over us. We are at it again. Help us not to think it more significant than it is, but also give us and those we elect enough wisdom to acknowledge our follies. Help us laugh at ourselves, for without humor our politics cannot be humane. We desire to dominate and thus are dominated. Free us, dear Lord, for otherwise we perish. Amen.

—Dr. Stanley Hauerwas of Duke Divinity School (quoted by Jeffrey Walton in “‘Keeping It Together’ with Hauerwas, Curry and Bolz-Weber on Election Anxiety,” 11.09.20, on the Juicy Ecumenism/IRD Website)

DIVISION IN CHURCH AND DIVISION IN SOCIETY: BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

—John 17:21-22 (NRSV)

For years, the possibility of formally dividing The United Methodist Church has been discussed and debated in some quarters. Interestingly, this discourse has always focused on how denominational division would affect United Methodism, United Methodists and the post-division denominations. But a division of The United Methodist Church would influence not only United Methodism but also the larger society—actually, societies—beyond United Methodism.

Divided Church

Kirchenkampf, a German word, means “church struggle.” It is most often used to describe church life in Germany from 1933 until 1945. During those years, the Confessing Church (in which Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer worked against all odds for the purity of the Gospel and the faithfulness of the churches) struggled against the “German Christians.” The German Christians wanted to “update” the Gospel and the churches with then-popular National Socialist thought and practice, to make the Gospel and the churches appear to be more “relevant” to German society. So a church struggle unfolded as a result of the rise of National Socialism in Germany.

But another church struggle has been—and is today—occurring in The United Methodist Church (and, let’s be honest, in many other denominations and communions throughout the West). In The United Methodist Church, this

latter-day church struggle begins with United Methodist elites (that is, bishops and professors, denominational executives and high-steeple pastors) following the intellectual fashions found on university, college, and seminary campuses. More recently, modernity and modernism, wherein all abide by what is accepted as the universal truths derived from the Enlightenment, were all the rage. Most recently, post-modernity and post-modernism arose; in post-modernity and post-modernism one gets to have and to hold one’s own “truth” or the “truth” of one’s tribe. Dissatisfied with this complete and uncritical openness to currents of intellectual fashion in the American academy, evangelical and orthodox and some centrist United Methodists entered into, and continued, various forms of struggle with their denominational “betters.” This church struggle has been ongoing in The United Methodist Church since 1968, the year of the denomination’s birth, and it continues to this day. Good News, The Confessing Movement, UMAction/IRD, and the Wesleyan Covenant Association are the largest, evangelical-orthodox players in today’s continuing church struggle. Lifewatch plays a more humble role.

The bottom line is this: Today there is an ongoing church struggle within The United Methodist Church. The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation was discussed and proposed—and its petitions for the next General Conference drafted and submitted—to end, once and for all, this church struggle.

Divided Society

Kulturkampf is German for “culture war.” This word was invented in the 1870s to describe Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and his government fighting against the Roman Catholic Church to establish the state’s unquestionable, cultural dominance in Germany.

Over 100 years later, Dr. James Davison Hunter, popularized the phrase “culture war” in the United States. Dr. Hunter, a sociologist at the University of Virginia, published Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America (Basic Books)

in 1991. In his book, Dr. Hunter applied the German idea of “culture war” to the long-standing, political conflict in the United States between conservatives and liberals, or traditionalists and progressives, on matters related to abortion, homosexuality, race, and other controversial, public issues.

It is no secret that culture wars are now all over American public life. Whenever presidential politics, COVID-19 response, race/racism, abortion, homosexuality, and gun rights are mentioned, most Americans quickly fall into line—just under half with the left, just under half with the right, and a few in the nervous-Nellie, hand-wringing middle.

Over time, the culture wars have dug a very deep divide between conservatives and liberals. That divide, between right and left, now appears everywhere in American public life—in politics, in science, in medical care, in education, in higher education, in entertainment, in denominational life, and even in the local church. The culture wars and their combatants are constantly beckoning all members of society to enlist and to fight.

So, the divided United Methodist Church lives and moves and has its being in a very divided United States of America. Similar divisions in churches and societies also seem to be unfolding beyond United Methodism and far beyond the United States.

Divided Methodism in Divided America in the 1800s

In the 1800s, American Methodists were divided, and American citizens were divided. Then the presenting issue was the evil institution of slavery.

Dr. Mark A. Noll, an American historian, taught for years at Wheaton College. In due course, he became the Francis A. McAney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. In 2006, he received a National Humanities Medal. In his 2006 National Humanities remarks, Dr. Noll provides a narrative that helps American Methodists to understand our past. He begins: “‘From 1790 through the next 100 years, [U.S.] churches played a most active role in civil society.... By 1860 there were 55,000 Protestant churches in the United States that more or less followed evangelical traditions, about 20,000 being Methodist.’” (National Endowment for the Humanities, National Humanities Medal 2006, Report by “MR,” here and following)

It is crucial to specify, with some precision, what authority guided evangelicals of the 1800s and where it guided them. Dr. Noll claims “that generally evangelicals accept the Bible as the supreme religious authority and believe in taking an activist role in sharing their beliefs.” In other words, the Bible, understood authoritatively, led evangelicals not only to personal faith but also to public witness and work.

The National Endowment for the Humanities report continues: “In The Civil War as a Theological Crisis (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Noll says that as the slavery issue heated up across the nation, evangelicals on both sides were able to use the Bible to make their own cases. Both abolitionists in the North and pro-slavery advocates in the South drew political ammunition from the scriptures.

“‘The success of evangelical groups presenting a form of Christianity in which the individual looks to the Bible is shown here,’ says Noll. ‘It was instructive on every side that we say we should do this or that on the basis of the Bible.’” (emphasis added)

“According to Noll, [t]he Protestant churches in the newly created nation...were microcosms of democracy formed by ordinary people with no formal religious training. ‘The religious movement in the United States did not necessarily rely on laws or traditions...but was decided on by the people who wanted the task.’” Exactly those people relied upon the Bible for guidance.

In a review of Noll’s book, The Civil War as a Theological Crisis, Peter Wallace quotes Noll: “[E]vangelical Protestants who believed the Bible was true and who trusted their own interpretations of Scripture above all religious authorities, constituted the nation’s most influential cultural force. By 1860, religion had reached a higher point of public influence than at any other time in American history.” (emphasis added)

Where did all this evangelical public influence lead? A standoff. A stalemate. The evangelicals (which included a large proportion of Methodists), each relying on his own interpretation of the Biblical witness, could not settle the issue of slavery. The evangelicals’ theologians (which included more than a few Methodists) could not settle the issue of slavery. The evangelicals’ churches (which included the Methodist Episcopal Church [in the North] and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South [in the South]) could not settle the issue of slavery.

Unresolved by evangelicals and their churches, contentions over slavery spilled into the culture and then into the political realm. And when the issue of slavery overloaded the ways and means of democratic deliberation and decision making, there was but one means of resolution remaining: war. The Civil War.

Wallace, the reviewer, quotes Noll, the historian: “The failure of the theologians to resolve their differences meant that it was left to those consummate theologians [Civil War generals] to decide what in fact the Bible actually meant.”

Following Dr. Mark Noll, one can see that Methodist evangelicals in the earlier 1800s were members and ministers in a divided church (that formally divided in 1844) and citizens of a divided nation (that indeed divided and went to war in 1860). Tragically, because Methodists themselves were divided, they could not help the divided American nation to resolve its crisis over slavery.

The Witness of a Divided Church in a Divided Nation Today

As this article finally draws to a conclusion, keep in mind that Richard John Neuhaus (1936-2009)—the Lutheran pastor, then Roman Catholic priest, who was always committed to the Church’s witness in the public square—often asserted: “Culture is the root of politics, and religion is the root of culture.” (It might be easier to grasp Neuhaus’ idea when his sentence is rearranged to read: “Religion is the root of culture, and culture is the root of politics.”)

Mindful of the idea that religion guides culture and culture directs politics, how about the witness of a divided church in a divided nation? The following observations might be made.

1. When a divided church cannot make up its mind about its own faith and life (that is, when its catholicity is in doubt), societal division often aggravates division in the church. Methodism struggled with slavery in the 1800s and

with sexuality over the last 50+ years. In both cases, the church's lack of catholic substance (or Biblical and Traditional doctrine and discipline) made the church vulnerable to the divisive culture wars and political battles of the day. When a divided church formally separates in such trying circumstances, it looks distressingly similar to other institutions that are unraveling in the polarized society. A divided church, especially when it institutionally separates, cannot provide "a sign that will be opposed" or "a sign of contradiction" (i.e., a sign that this world would push against; from Luke 2:34, NRSV) to a divided culture and a divided politics. Its sad example declares to all: this divided church simply reflects this divided culture and this divided politics. Remember American Methodism and slavery.

2. When a church considers dividing, authority in that church is diminished. Its doctrine, morals, and discipline likely become matters of choice for its clergy and laity.

That is what happened, in American Methodism, in the 1800s; and that is what is happening, in American Methodism, in our time. "I prefer that church's doctrines," says one pastor. "I will attend that local church instead of the other," declares that layman. As a result, authority in the church is drained away. Considering the possibility of dividing, a church begins to look like every other authority-free zone (where there were once real, substantive, culture-shaping, life-guiding institutions) in the divided society.

3. When a church divides, the culture and politics of the resulting denominations can become extremely, irredeemably predictable and partisan. Post-division denominations do not provide space for people with different cultural commitments and different political parties to gather. Post-division denominations are not common-ground, common-good churches. Post-division denominations tend to provide religious refuge for society's existing tribes: a conservative church for Republicans to attend, and a liberal-progressive church for Democrats to attend. Such churches cannot, with integrity, challenge the extreme polarization of culture and politics in the larger society—since those churches are themselves polarized, since those churches are themselves manifestations of a polarized society. Such churches simply reflect and reinforce the divisions of the larger society. At their worst, such churches usually allow polarized people and institutions to grow even more entrenched in their partisanship.

4. When a church remains unified (even if its unity is far from perfect) and carries catholicity (even if its catholic substance could be graded C-), in a polarized society, that church's witness can be powerful. That church, secure in its identity as the Body of Christ, confident in living under the Headship of Christ, can be a strong sign of contradiction to a divided world. It can invite all, from the left and the right, to repent and be baptized. It can welcome all, liberals, progressives, and conservatives, to the Lord's Table to receive His real presence. It can offer all, Democrats and Republicans, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. It can become a gathering place for all, in Christ's name, to call into question the idolatries of the world's politics. It can become Christ's countercultural community that demonstrates a different way, a faithful way, to live in a divided world.

"Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way;

it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

—I Corinthians 13:4-7, NRSV (PTS) ♥

CHURCH, BE THE CHURCH!

Recalling and reminding the Church to be the Church must be done constantly. Continually. After all, marching with determination and singing with joy, the Church is on a pilgrimage through time in this world. And this world, through which the Church marches, is filled with deception and distraction, lies and temptations. So the Church must be called back to her senses, to her vocation in this world, often. Day after day. Week after week. Year after year.

Church, Follow Christ!

George Weigel, the noted lay Catholic theologian and historian and commentator, often calls the Roman Catholic Church (especially, though not exclusively, in the United States) to be the Church of Jesus Christ. His challenges apply not only to the Roman Catholic Church but also to The United Methodist Church.

Weigel reflects: "[Pope John XXIII's] opening address to Vatican II on October 11, 1962, made his intention clear: The Church, he said, must refocus on Jesus Christ, from whom she 'takes her name, her grace, and her total meaning.' The Church must put the gospel proclamation of Jesus Christ, the answer to the question that is every human life, at the center of her self-understanding. The Church must make that proclamation by proposing, 'whole and entire and without distortion,' the truths Christ gave the Church. And the Church must transmit those truths in ways that invite skeptical contemporary men and women into friendship with the Lord Jesus." (from "The Next Pope and Vatican II," 7.15.20, Web Exclusives, www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/)

By understanding the Church (Body of Christ) under Jesus Christ (Head of the Body), George Weigel and Pope John XXIII are faithful to the Bible, to the Gospel, and to Church Tradition. When clergy and laity order the Church's life according to Christ's governance, the Church remains the Church. When clergy and laity order the Church's life apart from Christ's governance, all hell breaks loose.

Church, Look at Yourself!

St. Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379)—in *Letter 92, To the Bishops of Italy and Gaul* (quoted by James M. Kushiner [for the editors] in "Schools of Impiety: The Diabolical Failure of Leaders in the Present Crises," *Touchstone, A Journal of Mere Christianity*, January/February 2019)—sketches a revolting picture of the Church without Christ: "The doctrines of true religion are overthrown. The laws of the Church are in confusion. The ambition of men, who have no fear of God, rushes into high posts, and exalted office is now publicly known as the prize of impiety. The result is that the worse a man blasphemes, the fitter the people think him to be a bishop. Clerical dignity is a thing of the past. There is a complete lack of men shepherding the Lord's flock with knowledge. Ambitious men are constantly throwing away the provision for the poor on their own enjoyment and the distribution of gifts. There is no precise knowledge of canons. There is complete immunity in sinning: for when men have been placed in office

by the favor of men, they are obliged to return the favor by continually showing indulgence to offenders. Just judgment is a thing of the past; and everyone walks according to his heart's desire. Vice knows no bounds; the people know no restraint. Men in authority are afraid to speak, for those who have reached power by human interest are the slaves of those to whom they owe their advancement."

Basil goes on: "All the while unbelievers laugh; men of weak faith are shaken; faith is uncertain; souls are drenched in ignorance, because adulterators of the word imitate the truth. The mouths of true believers are dumb, while every blasphemous tongue wags free; holy things are trodden under foot; the better laity shun the churches as schools of impiety; and lift their hands in the deserts with sighs and tears to their Lord in heaven. Even you must have heard what is going on in most of our cities, how our people with wives and children and even our old men stream out before the walls, and offer their prayers in the open air, putting up with all the inconvenience of the weather with great patience, and waiting for help from the Lord."

Church, Repent!

What is to be done about a mess in the churches?

James M. Kushiner proposes: "The path forward is the same one we find in the Gospels and in the letters to the churches of Asia Minor: repentance. Peter, after his betrayal, repented with tears, and was restored to Christ's fellowship after the Resurrection. 'Peter, do you love me?' asked the Lord three times, and he charged Peter three times to feed his flock—and to 'follow me,' even to martyrdom...."

"Until the long-awaited Bridegroom who loves his bride comes, we are tasked with moral and doctrinal vigilance for love of him, during the night watches of this world so full of temptation." ("Schools of Impiety," Touchstone) (PTS) ♥

TO REFORM THE NATION: TRUTH AND UNITY

As the political dust continues to settle after the 2020 elections in the United States, this pastor, in fear and trembling, will attempt to write an article about reforming the nation.

After all of that dust has finally settled (assuming that it does), one thing will become strikingly clear to all Americans: The United States of America is not living up to its name, for the United States of America is not united; indeed, the United States of America is as divided as it was prior to the Civil War.

The nation's clear and present division is captured by the slogans used in the Democratic and Republican campaigns for president. Pushing Joe Biden, Democrats promised to "restore the soul of America." Advocating for Donald Trump, Republicans vowed to "make America great again." Judging by these slogans and their attendant messages, one could claim Democrats were dedicated to idealistic spiritualism and Republicans to economic materialism. Divisions do not get more basic than that.

A Proposal

The question arises: What could possibly begin to overcome some of the division, and incrementally increase the unity, of the United States of America?

Christians know that, when a crisis arises in the Church, it

is wise and faithful to return to the sources (or originating documents) for guidance—to the founding sources, to the Bible and to the Church's Tradition (especially to the writings of "primitive Christianity" [John Wesley] from the first three centuries of the Christian era). Likewise, when there is a crisis in the nation, it might be fruitful to return to the nation's founding sources. In the case of the United State of America, the founding source might be understood to be The Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776).

The beginning of The Declaration's second paragraph is most crucial: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...."

Pause for a moment. Consider the claims made by the American Founders in this section of The Declaration of Independence.

*There are "truths" in this world. This world is not a sea of subjectivism, not a "dictatorship of relativism" (Benedict XIV) . These truths are true the world over.

*There are "self-evident" truths in this world. Revelation from God is not required to receive these self-evident truths. (Though divine revelation can indeed deepen their meaning and widen their application.) These truths can be discerned and declared through the exercise of reason alone.

*This is self-evidently true: "all men are created equal." A Creator is assumed, then asserted, by The Declaration. This Creator creates people. The people created, by the Creator, are "equal." People are declared equal because they are given the same gift by the Creator.

*This is self-evidently true: "they [all men] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." The Creator gives all people the same "unalienable Rights"—rights that cannot be surrendered or shed in any way. The Creator—not a government, not a president, not a king, not even a constitution—gives all people the same rights. Only the Creator.

*This is self-evidently true: "among these [certain unalienable Rights] are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Each person has a right to live. In life, each person has a right to exercise freedom—especially for the good of others. In life, each person has a right to seek to serve and to enjoy the benefits of that completed service. Presumably, according to this line of The Declaration, the Founders hoped most American citizens would strive to exercise their lives, liberties, and pursuits in ways that please the Creator.

*This is self-evidently true: "to secure these [unalienable] rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...." Governments should not be tyrannies that do anything they want, against whomever they want. Governments are established by the people they serve. Governments receive their tasks and authority from the people, from "the consent of the governed." Governments recognize and protect the unalienable rights given by the Creator to the people and the exercise of those rights by the people.

This is, more or less, a brief summary of the political and moral vision of the American Founders. Pursuing this vision,

the United States of America becomes “a more perfect Union” (Preamble, The Constitution of the United States of America). Forsaking this vision, the United States of America wanders and stumbles and, by the grace of God working through providence over history, somehow finds renewal.

Forsaking the Declaration, Renewing the Nation

Dred Scott was an African-American slave in the United States, who legally sought freedom for his wife, his daughters, and himself. The Dred Scott legal case worked its way up the court system of the 1800s and finally reached the United State Supreme Court. Justice Roger B. Taney wrote in the majority decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857): “We think...that [Black people] are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time [of America’s founding] considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the government might choose to grant them.” (quoted by Maria McFadden Maffucci in “*Roe v. Wade—A Precedent to Be Deplored*,” The Human Life Review [Summer 2020], p. 93, which first appeared at <https://www.newsmax.com/mariamcfaddenmaffucci/roe-v-wade-stare-decisis/2020/07/16/id/977563>) Clearly, Justice Taney’s words—which represented the view of many Americans leading up to 1860—betrayed The Declaration and its vision.

During that time, Justice Taney’s misguided, immoral perspective had formidable competition. For example, in an 1854 speech, Abraham Lincoln had declared anew the vision of the Founders expressed in The Declaration: “The doctrine of self-government is right—absolutely and eternally.” According to Lincoln, this doctrine attacked slavery: “The relation of master and slaves is...a total violation of this principle. The master not only governs the slave without his consent; but he governs him by a set of rules altogether different from those which he prescribes for himself.” (quoted by Clark D. Forsythe in “Why the Declaration Still Matters for All Americans,” The Human Life Review [Summer 2020], p. 91, which first appeared on July 4, 2020 at National Review Online [www.nationalreview.com])

As it turned out, writes Maria McFadden Maffucci, the Editor in Chief of The Human Life Review, the United States Supreme Court’s “*Dred Scott* [decision] was never overturned...after the devastating Civil War, it was nullified by the 13th and 14th amendments, which abolished slavery and granted rights to all persons born or naturalized in the U.S., including former slaves.” (“*Roe v. Wade—A Precedent to Be Deplored*,” p. 93)

Maffucci notes a second violation of the vision set forth by

2021 LIFEWATCH SERMON

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, preacher

* * *

11:00 AM—January 29 (Friday), 2021

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Attend at

The Institute on Religion and Democracy
1023 15th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, D.C.

* * *

*Watch at www.lifewatch.org and
click on Evite icon*

The Declaration of Independence: “...in 1927 another Supreme Court decision—also never reversed—found that the 14th Amendment did not apply to some disabled citizens. In *Buck v. Bolton*, the Supreme Court ruled that the compulsory sterilization of the ‘unfit’ and intellectually disabled did not violate due process. Writing for the majority, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. declared: ‘It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their

imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.’

“Today, although much progress has been made for the rights of people with disabilities, the eugenic principles reflected in *Buck v. Bolton* are alive and well...” (pp. 93-94)

A third violation of The Declaration’s vision follows: “One controversial decision, *Korematsu v. U.S.* (which supported the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II) while not explicitly overruled, has been effectively disowned...” (p. 94)

And the last mentioned violation of The Declaration’s vision is *Roe v. Wade*. Maffucci speculates: “How will the ‘court of history’ (Justice Roberts’ phrase from *Trump v. Hawaii*, 2018) find the *Roe* decision? Justice Clarence Thomas is clear, in his *June v. Russo* dissent: ‘*Roe* is grievously wrong for many reasons, but the most fundamental is that its core holding—that the Constitution protects a woman’s right to abort her unborn child—finds no support in the text of the Fourteenth Amendment.’” (p. 94) Or in the text of The Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration Today and Tomorrow

Continuing to grapple with our national division, American citizens might return to The Declaration of Independence—especially when a reconsideration of *Roe* begins. Along the way, we citizens of the United States should remember Abraham Lincoln’s high regard for The Declaration: “Lincoln taught that the authors of the Declaration ‘meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, revered by all, constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, augmenting the happiness and value of life of all people of all colors everywhere.’ Our equal creation, rather than our sex, skin, or group, is necessary to ground human dignity and our respect for every individual. The challenge to Americans is that each generation must gain a renewed appreciation for the truths of The Declaration.” (Forsythe, p. 92)

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...” In those truths, Americans might discern our unity. (PTS) ♥

LIES HIDE MURDERS

“Mr. Jones,” a 2019 movie, presents the story of Walter Duranty telling lies to hide the murdering of millions by Joseph Stalin’s agricultural policies, and the story of Gareth Jones telling the truth about the murder of those 3,000,000 Ukrainians by those Stalinist policies. Duranty—a Pulitzer Prize-winning, New York Times reporter based in Moscow in 1932-3—is the powerful Goliath of this story. Jones—a young, hungry, idealistic journalist originally from Wales—is David.

This film, which is based on actual events and people, wonderfully asserts the significance of truth in this world, in history. In the story, truth peels back the lies and uncovers the murders, actually the millions of murders, that were hidden by the lies. What follows are lines from “Mr. Jones” that outline this story about a young journalist courageously telling the truth against a ruthless utopianism. The following lines commend the telling of the truth to all people—especially to Christians.

* * *

The Foundational Conversation

Ada Brooks (Duranty’s assistant): “So what’s the agenda now?”

Gareth Jones: “I don’t have an agenda—unless you call the truth an agenda.”

AB: “Ha. Whose truth?”

GJ: “The truth. There is only one kind.”

AB: “Ha, ha. That is so naive.”

GJ: “Journalism is the noblest profession. You follow the facts wherever it leads [sic]. You don’t take sides.”

AB: “...Berlin. There’s no place like it. The freedom. The art. The music. The culture. The Nazis: they are destroying everything so quickly.... I’m afraid for my friends. They’re [the Nazis are] arresting everyone in the Communist Party. We [those who support the Russian experiment in Communism] have to succeed. We don’t have a choice.”

GJ: “You sound like you work with Stalin.”

AB: “...I believe in a movement better than any one person.”

GJ: “What if you are wrong?”

AB: “That’s just not an option in it. Look, there is a cycle of history just like there are cycles of nature. There has been nothing but war and depression. And now is the chance to rebuild, to apply to the future.... I believe that this movement is bigger than any other.”

GJ: “But the human sacrifice. Do you hear yourself?”

AB: Silent.

* * *

Cool Responses to Jones Telling the Truth

George Orwell [yes, that George Orwell, after hearing Jones make a public presentation in London about the murderous conditions in Ukraine]: “Quite a story. Maybe the Soviets are doing the best they can, making the best decisions they can, given the circumstances. What about their free schools? And free hospitals?”

Gareth Jones: “Yes, but at what cost?”

GO: “A more egalitarian society does exist. It’s just not perfect. We can’t expect it to be. Experiments take time.”

GJ: “An egalitarian society? It’s the same system of exploitation that exists here [in the West]—only it’s worse.

Unimaginably worse. I know what I saw [in the Ukrainian famine].”

GO: “Of course you do. Of course you do. But one has to put it in the proper context.”

GJ: “Listen to me. Stalin is not the man you think he is.”

GO: “Are you saying there’s no hope?”

* * *

Gareth Jones: “How much is Stalin paying you? What is keeping you here [in Moscow] [shilling] for them [the Russians]?”

Walter Duranty: “You wouldn’t know the first thing about how difficult it is to report from Moscow today. Would you? Of course not.... It is not the job of a journalist to say, ‘How dare you, sir!’ You actually thought you could interview Stalin and make some kind of difference. Didn’t you?”

GJ: “[Here is a] souvenir. Tree bark. It’s all the people [of Ukraine] have left to eat.”

[Duranty and Jones briefly scuffle.]

WD: “My dear Mr. Jones. There comes a time in every man’s life when he must choose a cause greater than himself, than all his miserable little ambitions put together. Perhaps some day you will. It’s a shame. You would have made a fine journalist.”

* * *

Ada Brooks: “What will you do when the others come forward [to tell the truth about famine in Ukraine]?”

Walter Duranty: “There aren’t going to be others. You can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. What’s being done here [in Russia] will transform mankind....”

WD [dictates this statement for AB to type]: “In all my time in Moscow, I have never heard a tale as preposterous as that of Mr. Jones.... Certainly, conditions are not ideal in the Soviet Union. There are still great challenges. Stalin continues his march towards modernity.... The exaggerations of the notorious Gareth Jones do not portray the real, modern Russia, where Stalin is admired and loved.” [Then, the powerful Walter Duranty has his assistant, Ada Brooks, sign the statement. Another lie in the making.]

* * *

An Admiring Response to Jones Telling the Truth

[After leaving Moscow and Walter Duranty for Berlin, Ada Brooks read Gareth Jones’ second report on the famine. That report appeared thanks to the American newspaper titan William Randolph Hearst, Sr. publishing it. She sends Gareth a package, which contains the following note.]

Ada Brooks to Gareth Jones [In the film, the following note is read by Gareth Jones, as the note’s author is pictured in her Berlin apartment, with Hitler’s public-speaking voice blaring (from a radio or through an open window?) in the background. The stunned Mr. Jones is occasionally pictured.]: “I am at home in Berlin. How quickly things fall apart [because of the Nazis]. I’m writing for [a German publication] for the moment—till they [the Nazis] shut us down. I read your article. Congratulations, Gareth. Paul [a journalist in Moscow who was murdered by the Communists, because he was working on a report about the famine in Ukraine] would be so proud [of you]....”

* * *

Lies have also hidden, to a large extent, the realities of abortion in America. Big Media has played a role in this cover

up (as it did in the cover up noted in “Mr. Jones”). Over 62,000,000 children lost and women wounded, and counting. Each year that passes, more truths about abortion escape enforced cover up. Each year that passes, more truths about abortion are written and read, told and heard, remembered and acted upon. Thanks be to God. (PTS) ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

● Recently, big-picture matters—the virus, the next General Conference, and national politics—have probably dominated the thinking of many United Methodists. For that reason, reading How Cancer Cured Me: Healing Brokenness and Disease (Torchflame Books, Durham, NC, 2020) just might provide some relief. Written by Reverend David Gira of The United Methodist Church’s North Carolina Conference, How Cancer Cured Me is a 176-page, personal testimony about how God can use bad news to pry open a person to receive the Good News in a way that, over time, deeply and thoroughly sanctifies.

Rev. Gira—a busy, gifted pastor with a busy, gifted family—is diagnosed with cancer. In the years that follow, God heals this pastor of his cancer and, perhaps more impressively, his self-concern (which of course tempts all, but perhaps especially us pastors). The first healing occurs through God’s providence, and the arts and sciences of modern medicine. The second healing unfolds as God gives Gira—and as Gira admits his need for—courage, grace, forgiveness, compassion, get-up-and-go, strength, faith, provision, patience, rest, trust, joy friendship, healing, and glory. Each of these fifteen gifts is the title of a chapter in the book. Each chapter is a devotional telling of how God gives that particular gift, and how Rev. Gira is transformed by it.

The author’s prose is crystal clear and heartfelt. The reader cannot help but personally consider areas of life that cry out for attention and examination, repentance and redemption.

Highly recommended—especially now.

● Bishop William H. Willimon continues to teach and administer at Duke Divinity School. And as you know, he writes. And writes. And writes. He has now written over 70 books. If the Wild West used to refer to some “dying with their boots on,” Bp. Willimon might well go on to glory in the midst of composing his last book at his desktop computer. One of his most recent books is Accidental Preacher: A Memoir (Eerdmans, 2019). Bp. Willimon admits, in an interview, that “[t]he most interesting thing about me is I’ve been called....And my life wouldn’t have been of great interest had I not been called.”

The good bishop goes on: “More than we seem to like to admit as Americans, we are the sum of our relationships and the sum of our connections and all, and so that’s what I was trying to play with the ‘accidental’—that things we consider just sort of fluky and happenstance are deeply determinative of us.

“And I think one thing I like about Christian ministry is, in a way, it sort of rescues you from your self-conceived story. It writes over your life a story that you’re not the chief author of. And I think that’s a very un-American thing. It’s not a popular word around here, I’m sure, but it’s my last word.” (“Will Willimon: Who we are is determined by the

one who calls us,” <https://faithandleadership.com>, October 1, 2019, accessed on 10/03/19)

Willimon’s is a very wise word. Currently, the challenge before United Methodists is allowing the Church’s story—what we have often called The Story of the World (Dr. Robert Jenson)—to “write over” our individual stories and deeply incorporate each of us into the People of God, Christ’s Church, Christ’s Body. In other words, The Story of the World (not my own little story and not yours) preferably determines each of us and forms us into the community defined by that story.

It goes without saying (or writing), Bp. Willimon is always provocative. And often helpful.

● “If a hundred years from now, Christians are known as those who didn’t kill their babies or their elderly, we will have done well.” So says Dr. Stanley Hauerwas (as quoted by John Stonestreet with Roberto Rivera in “Dying Well in an Age of Denial,” Breakpoint Daily from the Colson Center, July 22, 2020). If Bp. Willimon is provocative, Dr. Hauerwas should be known as a provocateur.

● After the June 1, 2020 issue of Lifewatch was mailed, many of the copies destined for international delivery were returned to the Lifewatch office in Missouri. Why? Because of COVID-19 concerns. Some nations decided to stop the delivery of mail sent from the United States. Therefore, Mrs. Cindy Evans came to the rescue, and in early July she emailed the June 1 issue to Lifewatch’s international readers.

Bishop John Yambasu received his emailed Lifewatch on July 8. Bp. Yambasu, then-episcopal leader of the Sierra Leone Area (in West Africa), had many notable achievements: the president of the Council of Churches of Sierra Leone, the president of the African College of Bishops, the Chancellor of Africa University in Zimbabwe, the vice president of the General Board of Global Ministries, the convener of the group that produced the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” the husband of Millicent, and the father of five children.

On July 10, Bp. Yambasu responded to the July 8 Lifewatch email with an email of his own. Notice, in the email that follows, the bishop’s extraordinarily kind and encouraging spirit.

Dear Cindy [Evans]:

Thanks for navigating the challenges posed by COVID-19 to send out this very important News Letter [sic] around the world. I am a prolific reader of Lifewatch and would like to be on your [e]mailing list. So YES, please kindly have me on your ‘Mailchimp’ roster.

Thank you, and God’s richest blessings for this important Christian ministry to the global United Methodist family. In Christ,

Bishop John K. Yambasu

Five weeks later—on August 16, to be exact—Bp. Yambasu was dead. He was killed in a car wreck outside Freetown, Sierra Leone. According to a report, he was traveling to attend a funeral service.

What a great loss for the Church catholic and for The United Methodist Church! Here was a bishop who truly reached out to the whole Church, and who was often (if not always) a force for unity and faithfulness in his own church. May he rest in God’s peace, and may God continue to minister



Lifewatch
Taskforce of
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Abortion and Sexuality

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12/01/20

- * The ongoing church struggle
- * To reform our nation:
Truth and unity
- * "Mr. Jones" and Joseph Stalin

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comfort to Mrs. Yambasu, to their children, and to the Sierra Leone Area that he served so well.

- Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa, of Zimbabwe, has replaced Bp. Yambasu as the president of the African College of Bishops. In late October, the African bishops met. The Council of Bishops sent out an October 30 press release that gave an account of the African bishops' meeting. That press release strongly suggests that the bishops in Africa are exercising independence of thought. It states: "The African bishops felt that the Protocol needs to be renegotiated.... 'Those who might not feel comfortable to remain with the branch of the United Methodist Church or to leave with those starting a new church are left in limbo. More of those in this category are the African United Methodists and others in the Central conferences as well as in the United States of America itself,' the bishops noted." The bishops "also voiced concern that there was a lot of interference in African conferences by people from the United States who are causing confusion and hatred among Africans in the church. Effort should be made to stop such people from coming and sowing seeds of hatred among the Africans. 'If we Africans don't name who we are, someone else will do that on our behalf with disastrous consequences. It is time we tell our story,' the bishops said."

Sounds as if the "Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation"—which is an attempt to achieve a lawsuit-free schism—should not necessarily be considered a slam dunk, at least among the African bishops, at the next General Conference.

- "Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation." Think about that title for a moment. How, exactly, can reconciliation and separation go together? If "reconciliation" truly means coming together after

estrangement, two parties cannot reconcile by separating, nor can they separate by reconciling—even if "grace" gets sprinkled on top. That is nonsense. Always be careful with high-sounding, public-relations titles that are affixed to controversial projects. (Forgive me for that rant.)

- Commentary magazine has a daily podcast. Each program begins with the song "Hope for the Best (Expect the Worst)," which is from a Mel Brooks album, "The Twelve Chairs." The song's lyrics are probably intended to prepare the listener for the thoughtful conversation on society that follows: "Hope for the best. Expect the worst. Some drink champagne. Some die of thirst. No way of knowing, which way it's going. Hope for the best. Expect the worst." If one has no hope in God, that might be a reasonably sensible way to approach the challenges of this world. But since a lively hope in God is alive and well in many hearts, minds, and lives, much more is asked of—and expected from—of those with such hope. No matter what the circumstances.

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

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