

WE CONFESS

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METHODISTS SAY “NO” TO THEIR LEADERS

By Dr. Bill Bouknight

United Methodists in America are clearly rejecting some proposals of their leaders. Those leaders are the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table (47 clergy and laypersons), and many of the delegates to the 2008 General Conference. That group was responsible for the 32 constitutional amendments that were approved by at least a 2/3rd vote of the 2008 General Conference.

As of this date (June 24), the rank and file United Methodists of America, expressing themselves through their Annual Conferences, have delivered a resounding rejection to the six most dangerous amendments—Amendments I (1), IV (4), X (10), XIII (13), XXIII (23), and XXVI (26). Currently most of the amendments are being rejected by at least a 2/3rd vote. None of them has received even a simple majority (51%) approval. And we haven't heard from most of the Central Conferences yet.

American Methodists are sending some clear messages to their leadership:

1. Many delegates to the 2008 General Conference did not represent very well the beliefs and concerns of United Methodists back home.

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2. The leadership of our church should stop tinkering with our organization because organization is not our problem.
3. The main problem of the UMC is spiritual and theological. We no longer have consensus about our mission and message. We're not sure anymore that all persons in their natural condition are lost and need to be saved. We're not sure anymore about the purpose of the cross and whether it was necessary. We have a desperate need for our bishops to lead us in recovering our fundamental beliefs as stated in our Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith.

St. Paul taught us that “if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?” (I Cor. 14:8). Over the past forty years, Methodism's gospel trumpet has often been muted and sometimes silent. We don't need to compromise Christ with culture. We must lift up Christ in order to transform culture. •

Voting Results

To find the most up to date voting results, go to www.goodnewsmag.org and click on “Spreadsheet View” under Voting Updates.

Almost all of the 62 U.S. Annual Conferences have now voted on the Proposed Constitutional Amendments. 44 Annual Conferences have released complete vote tallies while others have voted, but have yet to release any official tallies. For the 44 Annual Conferences whose votes have been tallied, the aggregate totals are as follows: Proposed Amendment 1 received 15,680 (47%) Yes votes and 17,511 (53%) No votes. Proposed Amendment 19 received 24,700 (77%) Yes votes and 7,314 (23%) No votes. None of the 23 Proposed Amendments regarding the World-wide Nature of the Church have passed so far. The five Proposed Amendments that would authorize the creation of Regional Conferences have only received between 34% and 36% of the votes (not the required two-thirds vote).

Thoughts on the Proposed Constitutional Amendments by John Ed Mathison

President Barack Obama's Democratic allies in the Senate reversed course on Tuesday, May 19, 2009, and refused to finance the move to close Guantanamo Bay prison. They denied the request for \$80 million because the administration lacked a satisfactory plan of what to do with the 240 detainees there.

Our Annual Conference will be asked to vote on 32 amendments to the Constitution which could drastically change the way the United Methodist Church does ministry in the future. The plan for putting these Amendments into action has not been presented yet. Changing the Constitution is a dangerous process. We must be sure of the implications of this before we change the Constitution.

Therefore, we need to reverse the close vote of General Conference and vote against these Amendments because no legitimate plan has been set forth. We can defeat the Amendments now, then look at the plan that is being devised during this quadrennium, and if it is a good plan, have the Amendments presented again next General Conference. If the plan is a good plan for The United Methodist Church for the future, we will be better informed and can make a responsible decision four years from now.

I urge a vote against amendments III, IV, V, VII, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XVI, XVIII, XX, XXI, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII. (3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32)

For my comments on all amendments, please go to my website www.johnedmathison.org.

The above article was originally posted as a blog on the Alabama/West Florida Annual Conference website.

Abraham on Outler

The following was excerpted from Dr. William J. Abraham's January 7 address to the Congress on Evangelism in Nashville, TN and summarized by Joseph Slife.

It is now time to get past...the appropriate praise [of the late United Methodist theologian Albert Outler] and to start coming to terms with the stark reality that lies at the core of Outler's work, and the work of United Methodism insofar as it embodies Outler's proposals.... The form of Methodism that was constructed under Outler's tutelage and watch—it is that form that has suffered drastic decline over the last 40 years....

Now, I'm not going to give you the catalogue of all the difficulties I see in Outler's position. I think there are many problems in his position. I don't think he

took nearly seriously enough the radical offense of the gospel.... I don't think that he took sin sufficiently seriously....

That's two of a number of items...[but] I want to focus in on two criticisms.

First, Outler's proposals concerning the practice of evangelism are much more rhetorical than they are substantial.... [They fail to] deal head on with the pivotal need to bring the gospel to the world, and then proceed to make—and not just nurture—disciples.

Thus, Outler limits evangelism to proclamation or witness, and he sets his face against the critical need for initiation into a robust version of Christianity.... Now, secondly, I think that the fundamental methodology [of Outler's evangelism model] is superficially attractive but ultimately disastrous for the theory and

practice of evangelism. [His strategy] was simple: develop a vision of the core of Christianity, then express that within the conceptual and intellectual norms of the host culture.

We did that in the modern period, and we're about to do that in the post-modern period. We're now in the throes, in fact, of a fresh application of that strategy—and I'm going to watch with a very close eye as to how that works itself out over the next 20 years.

Now, I think the Emergent movement...[is] very important... But pay attention. We could end up 20 to 30 years from now in fact "giving away the store" because we make post-modernity the intellectual norms into which we're going to translate the faith—and we will discover, in fact, that this has been a case of death by our own hand....

There are two separate issues that need to be faced in evangelism.... First, there's the issue of how we justify the core truth claims of Christianity in the face of concerted incredulity, if not outright hostility.

The other issue is the radically different problem of how we connect the claims that we advance and the practices we advance with the culture we currently inhabit.

These [two issues] are quite different.

Now, to be quite frank about this, Outler gave up on that first enterprise. He did not have in his day...the resources to deal with the massive intellectual attack on Christianity that was launched by David Hume, by Kant, by Nietzsche, by Freud, by Marx, by Russell, by Ayer, and by Antony Flew....

What Outler did was collapse these [two issues of evangelism into one] by insisting that we translate the faith into "the language of the university common room, the couch, and the country club."

This was precisely what he did when he turned to process philosophy and to psychotherapy. These represented the high-brow intellectual culture which Outler inhabited....

This strategy...is a recipe for decline and death. It offers a woolly "Christianization" of contemporary high-brow cultural commitments in the name of faith. And we can be sure that the contemporary norms of thought will swallow up and devour the content of the faith....

I don't care whether you call it modernity or whether you call it post-modernity..., if we simply take [cultural forms] as the norms that are going to guide our reception of the Christian faith over the next 30 years, then we'll have even less in the "hard drive" of United Methodism than we currently have.

What [we need in] evangelism is... a deep re-appropriation of the faith that is intellectually serious, that is sensitive to the situation in which we find ourselves, and that is going to reinstate the actual deep traditional practices of evangelism, involving...the communication of the faith by laity and clergy and initial catechesis and formation, which will enable people to survive in the world in which they've got to live....

[The gospel] is the radical news of...the arrival of heaven on earth. It is the arrival of the Kingdom of God in and through Jesus Christ, in his death, in his life, and in his resurrection. And if we don't have that at the core, we are dead in the water....

[I]f we stick simply to the modern and post-modern world, [our evangelism] cannot be rooted and grounded in special revelation as enshrined in the [historic] faith of the Church. And the purpose of that revelation is to really disclose the truth about God....

The whole point of revelation is to reveal. And if we do not know who our God is—and are able to defend that—then we are not going to have the gospel itself. I think that the overall outcome of the Outler strategy across 40 years can be stated simply: the Church becomes an endless seminar in search of elusive and ultimately unattainable truth, rather than the carrier of the rich and salutary "faith once delivered to the saints."...

United Methodist scholars and leaders have given up on any serious intellectual defense of the faith, opting instead for the quest for the culturally relative translation that will somehow take us through to another generation....

Any effort to develop a concentrated church-wide united practice of evangelism is doomed to failure because in fact there is no common faith among us.

Any proposal to this end will be evaluated not—please hear me gently here—any proposal will be evaluated

not in terms of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but in terms of the gospel as perceived in our current social, intellectual, and political location.

And Jesus will simply become a cipher for our own passions and desires. •

Purpose Statement

Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord. The Confessing Movement exists to enable The United Methodist Church to retrieve its classical doctrinal identity, and to live it out as disciples of Jesus Christ.

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