



WE CONFESS



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“I WONDER IF YOU’RE LIKE ME”

By: Rev. Rob Renfroe



Hi, my name is Rob, and I’m a Christian.

When I tell you I’m a Christian, I’m not telling you that I grew up in the church. I did, but that’s not what I’m telling you. I’m not telling you about a “faith tradition” I

have chosen or a religion that I have embraced.

When I tell you I’m a Christian, I’m telling you about a relationship I have experienced. I’m telling you about a person that I love and that I follow. And his name is Jesus. I’m telling you that, by the grace of God, I don’t simply know about him. But in some way I can’t fully explain, I know him. It means I believe what Peter said about him: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” It means that I believe what he said about himself that he is “the way and the truth and the life.”

When I tell you I’m a Christian, it means that no one’s opinion of me matters except for Christ’s. And that the great longing of my heart is that when I die and stand before him, I will hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

I wonder if you’re like me.

Hi, my name is Rob, and I’m a United

Methodist.

That means I’m part of a spiritual tradition which has always joined personal experience with social holiness and a passion for the truth with compassion for people.

When I say I’m a Methodist it means I have a heritage of heroes. It means I walk in the footsteps of John and Charles Wesley, Francis Asbury and Peter Cartwright. It means I cannot attend Annual Conference without thinking of the first Methodist preachers on this continent – how of the first 700 to die in North America, their lives were so hard and their sacrifices so great that nearly half of them died before they were 30 years old and two-thirds died before they had served 12 years taking the Gospel to others. It means that I am part of a tradition that was once the hottest fire that burned on this planet for the cause of Christ.

When I say I am a Methodist, it means that I am proud, but it also means that I am sad because I’m part of a tradition that in many respects has lost its way. It means that I belong to a denomination which has closed 38,000 churches within the last 100 years. That’s one a day, every day, every year for the past 100 years.

It means that I’m part of a movement begun by a man who said, “I am a man of one Book,” but that now has pastors say, as one did on the floor of a past General Conference, “We don’t go back to the Bible for the last word on any-

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thing.”

Though many would prefer to live in denial, it means that I am part of a divided, confused and hurting church.

I wonder if you're like me. You love your heritage and at the same time you find yourself crying for your church.

Hi, my name is Rob, and I'm an evangelical.

By that I mean that I believe the Scriptures. By that I mean that I don't believe that the Scriptures just point to the word of God or that they contain the word of God. It means I believe they are the word of God.

I know the Scriptures are sometimes difficult to interpret. I know the value of reason and tradition and experience. I know that God has given us minds and we honor him when we use them, especially in our study of his word.

But I also know that if the Bible contains it, it's not my prerogative to "correct" it. Being evangelical means that I don't need the latest copy of "Psychology Today" or this morning's Gallup Poll or some pontificator of political properness to tell me if the Bible got it right or wrong on matters of morality. It means that I am willing to stand on the promises of the Bible and I am unashamed to stand under its authority no matter how unpopular that stand may be.

I wonder if you're like me.

Hi, my name is Rob, and I am a member of The Confessing Movement.

For the first 18 years of my ministry I couldn't say that. I'm a baby boomer, and we're not big on joining groups because we, as a rule, don't trust institutions. That's in my generation's social DNA. So for 18 years it was a few friends and me, wishing that the United Methodist Church was different and wishing that even some of the renewal movements within the United Methodist Church were different. And we stayed busy in our local churches, trying to do God's work there, never

getting involved with anything larger.

But as the church continued to drift from its Wesleyan, orthodox heritage, I finally decided that I had to become part of some organized movement that was committed to the truths of Scripture. But I had to find a group that cared as much for people as it did for truth because it seemed to me that God loved both.

By God's grace I attended a national conference of The Confessing Movement in Tulsa. I found intelligent, caring people of every race and economic group from every part of the country. They were people who, as I had done, had cried many tears for the church they loved, but instead of walking out, they had decided to stand fast and make a difference.

What I really found was the majority of United Methodists, just like the ones I had met in small rural churches, county seat towns, the suburbs and urban centers – people who don't understand how the church has gotten where it is, but who are committed to making it what it should be.

*Together, by
God's grace,
we will make a
difference!*

Again, by God's grace, one of my dreams was fulfilled. I got to know Bill Hinson and was even granted the privilege of being on his staff at First UMC, Houston. He brought me onto the national board to serve with some of the finest

men and women I have ever known. And this past fall I was elected to be our president.

I wonder if you're like me. You believe that one of God's great gifts to the Christian family and to the world is our Wesleyan understanding of the faith. And you have decided that it's worth praying for, working for, standing for and sacrificing for. And you know that to make a difference you have to join with others who share your heart.

I wonder if you're like me. You sense that this is our time to be faithful. If so, then as Wesley said, "give me your hand," and I will give you mine. And together, by God's grace, we will make a difference. ■

“DON’T FORGET THE COLLEGES”

By: Dr. Stephen Rankin

It’s very strange that in all the talk about how to get our beloved church out of the doldrums, the one area most often overlooked is how and where our young people hear a call to ministry. If we really want to change the church, we must pay more attention to what’s happening on college campuses. Since I work at such a place, I’ve started my own little campaign to convince people that, with regard to theological education, the college years are just as crucial as the seminary years. Let’s not forget them.

Some important statistics: Lovett Weems at Wesley Theological Seminary has shown recently that the number of elders under the age of 35 stands at 850, a tiny fraction of the total number of elders. The average age of elders is 51 and the median age, more importantly, is 58. The Association of Theological Schools shows that, though the age trend is inching ever so slowly downward, the vast majority of UM seminary students are in their thirties and forties. A generation still is falling through the cracks.

We’d better pay attention to the numbers. We are an aging church and that is partly because we have an aging clergy. Our congregations look like us. If we want young people in the church, we need to hear and take to heart what they’re saying. They’re mission-minded and passionate to serve. They are, I believe, the next “greatest generation.” But they’re also by and large morally and theologically naïve, even malformed (certainly malnourished). They need Christian community. They need mentoring. They need to be catechized. And college is where it can happen.

Billy Abraham has referred to systematic theology as “university level catechesis.” In my role at Southwestern College, I thus get to be a “catechist” for college students. I have

the holy privilege of being something of a father in the faith to them. I know that it doesn’t sound very professor-ish to speak of my job that way, but that is how I see it.

Please indulge the personal story, because it helps to illustrate what I am trying to say. Years ago, after a good while in pastoral ministry, I went to graduate school to do a Ph.D. because I felt a call to help prepare people for ordained ministry. I did what most of us academics do: I assumed the path would end in teaching in seminary. Yet I never felt completely at ease and I waffled. I dallied with a couple of opportunities. I taught adjunct while I pastored. Then I received a call that would change my course and my life. I wound up

doing something completely unanticipated. I became a college religion professor and campus minister. I thus began interacting with emerging adults. To be sure, when I started, I felt very much like Abraham: I went out, not knowing where I was going.

Some years into the work during a chapel service, standing at the

back of the room where we held chapel (no kidding, it was standing room only), I ran smack dab into the burning bush. Our chapel gatherings are student-led, therefore very contemporary. This day I was singing along, but watching the students from behind them as they worshipped. As I looked at their uplifted faces and hands and as I listened to them sing and pray, I was pierced by their unabashed yearning for the Holy. I was overwhelmed by their passion for the Kingdom. In that moment, I believe God spoke. He said, “Your job is to *pour your life* into these students.” Those were the exact words I heard. I began to weep.

From that day forward I have thought of my job as professor/campus minister quite differ-

“If we want young people in the church, we need to hear and take to heart what they’re saying.”

ently. Yes, I'm an academic and I try to challenge my students to think and think well. But I am also their older brother. I ought to be (and hope I am) a little further down the path of discipleship than they are and they need people like me to come alongside them. My job – even as an academic – is to share my life (not just my knowledge) with them for the sake of the Kingdom. My charism is to catechize young believers.

Let us then do as Billy Abraham has said: let us re-claim theology as university-level catechesis. Instead of being merely a cognitive exercise (“critical reflection”), let it be what it is – formative grace for disciples of Jesus. At Southwestern College, we take this notion very seriously. Our discipleship program requires students (of all majors) to engage daily in the spiritual disciplines, to meet weekly in covenant/accountability groups, to take courses in Bible, theology, church history and leadership and to engage in ministry through a variety of avenues. Each student has a mentor. We teach them that all these activities are normal for all Christians, not just the professionals.

In these activities we have two major aims. First, we pray that our graduates will become exemplary, dedicated Christian leaders in local churches. We want to shape theologically well-formed laity. Second, we are sending people to seminary who are actually ready for seminary. They will hit the ground running, so

to speak, and they will maximize their experience in graduate theological education. And – dare I say it – they will not be quite as susceptible to the acids of skepticism and hostility toward the faith once delivered that people sometimes encounter in seminary. Why? Because they will have already been exposed to and had to think about deep philosophical, theological, existential questions. It has been already part of their formation, their discipleship. They've been asked some hard questions, not just intellectual but spiritual. In college we don't just challenge. We walk with them as elder brothers and sisters in the faith.

College students are crucial for the future of the church. (Let me add quickly that young people who do not go to college are also crucial for the church, but I must speak about my context.) Campus ministries and academic programs done right provide what they need – university-level catechesis. Most people who enter vocational ministry first hear their call between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. College campuses are still major venues for this work of God. What happens there is absolutely crucial. Let's not forget. ■

(The preceding article by Dr. Stephen Rankin represents something good that is happening in the Church. Professor Rankin's teaching and leadership will make a difference in The United Methodist Church).

AFRICAN BISHOPS AND THE EPISCOPALIANS

By Dr. Riley Case

When ten churches in Virginia voted to disaffiliate with the Episcopal Church in mid-December the bishop of the diocese, Bishop Peter Lee, according to Episcopal News Service, expressed regret that Nigerian and Ugandan congregations were “occupying Episcopal Churches.” If it indicates nothing else this incredible charge reveals how much upheaval the mainline churches are experienc-

ing over issues relating to homosexuality and Biblical interpretation, and how churches of “the Global South” are assuming more and more influence in world Christianity.

Ironies abound. The Episcopal Church is America's oldest American denomination and Virginia historically is mother of the denomination. Few who viewed Gerald Ford's funeral in the Washington Cathedral would fail

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to be moved by the reverence and beauty of the service. The Truro Church of Fairfax, one of the key churches choosing disaffiliation, was the church of George Washington. The ten churches represent 11% of the membership of the diocese and 18% of the attendance. They represent 14 million dollars in plate offerings. Within the past 200 years those churches included many members who were slaveholders. They hardly seem like the kind of churches who would look to Africa for help.

By way of contrast the churches in Nigeria and Uganda face incredible problems in their own nations. In Uganda Anglicans were martyred under Idi Amin not many years ago. Most of their members live in poverty. They face a crippling HIV epidemic. In Nigeria the church faces continual conflict with Islam. Dozens of churches have been burned and believers killed. Yet these churches are vital and growing. The church in Nigeria with 20 million members dwarfs the Anglican Church in England, the Episcopal Church in America, with 2.2 million members, and the Anglican Church of Canada with 500,000 members.

The leaders of the Anglican churches in Uganda and Nigeria are not willing that Anglicanism in America, represented by the Episcopal Church, should so quickly disintegrate and have offered Episcopal oversight for the American churches so that they would still be considered part of the world Anglican communion. American liberals are infuriated. They in essence have declared that they themselves are right in matters of faith and practice and the rest of the world is misguided. They have argued that the message of the church is basically "inclusivity" and that matters like homosexuality are culturally conditioned. This kind of talk infuriates Anglican churches outside Australia, United States, Great Britain, and Canada, who still believe the Bible is the Word of God and that Jesus Christ is the only way to salva-

tion. Some of these churches have declared they no longer see themselves in communion with these secularized and "progressive" churches of the Global North. There is a cost in this stand. The Nigerian Church has turned down \$400,000 this past year from the American church as a matter of principle.

In response the Africans are accused of "trying to hi-jack the American church." They have (of course) been labeled as "fundamentalists," which in the American context is a pejorative label meaning rigid and unacceptable. One African said in reply, "I don't know what 'fundamentalist' is; I just know I believe the Bible."

The archbishop of the Nigerian Church, Peter Jasper Akinola, and of the Ugandan Church, Henry Luke Orombi, were recognized this month by *World* magazine as "Daniels of the Year," persons who because of biblical stands have made a significant difference in the world.

The situation in the Episcopal Church is still in flux. Anglicans, with a high doctrine of the church, are not easily given to schism. Discussions and negotiations are in process. These become difficult when the presiding bishop of the denomination, Katherine Jefferts Schori, declared the people of the departing churches "a splinter collection of malcontents" who failed to embrace "diversity" and "tension," which she defined as the essence of Anglicanism. Still, other churches and some dioceses are pondering whether they should also follow the lead of the Virginia churches. Of considerable import is the matter of property (the value of the Truro church property is 10 million dollars, of the Falls Church in Falls Church, Virginia, 17 million). Legal action seems sure to come.

If this all can take place in the Episcopal Church, not normally known for passion in religion, what is the future of United Methodism if it follows the Episcopalian example? ■

“ARE WE A GLOBAL CHURCH?”

By: Dr. Ira Gallaway

In the article on the preceding pages by Dr. Riley Case entitled “African Bishops and The Episcopalians”, it is clear that the Anglican Churches of the South, (or developing world), are having a great impact on The Anglican Church world-wide. In the Lambuth Conference the Churches of the South have made it clear that they will not keep fellowship with the Churches of the West, Europe and North America, if they abandon orthodox theology and doctrine or the teaching of the Scripture on human sexuality.

While the political reality in world-wide Anglicanism and the tie of all Anglicans and/or Episcopalians with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lambuth Conference is much more specific than the tie of Methodism Churches to the World Methodist Council, the influence of the Methodist Churches of the South on Methodism, and particularly on the General Conferences of United Methodism, has been significant. Certainly, the impact on General Conference by African and Asian Methodists has been crucial in United Methodism.

Because of this relationship with our General Conference, there are two recent happenings which should be of great concern to all apostolic or orthodox United Methodists. The first is the recent ruling of the Judicial Council that the Methodist Church of Cote d’Ivoire would be represented by only two delegates to the 2008 General conference. A motion passed by the Council stated, “The Annual Conference within the Cote d’Ivoire Episcopal area shall be represented at the 2008 General Conference with two delegates (one lay and one clergy)”. In a signed dissent, four Council members – Rudolph Beltran, the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, the Rev. Keith Boyette, and Dr. James Holsinger held that the action of the 2004 General Conference was unconstitutional.

However, paragraph 2608 of the 2004 Discipline requires that an “affirmative vote of at least six members of the Council shall be neces-

sary to declare any act of the General Conference unconstitutional”. There were only seven members of the Judicial Council present and voting so the three vote minority carried the day. It is more than interesting to note that the three votes cast to limit the Church of Cote d’Ivoire to two votes in the General Conference of 2008 were made by the “liberal” members of the Council. Could it be that they did not want the Church of Cote d’Ivoire with its 579,000 members fully represented because those Churches would be represented by delegates who were thoroughly orthodox and biblical in social doctrine? Hopefully the Judicial Council will change this decision in their Spring meeting.

The second concern is the action of the task force of the Council of Bishops that all five U. S. Jurisdictions become a part of one Central Conference, which could evolve into the United Methodist Church having its own General Conference and Book of Discipline separate from the overseas Church. It would appear on the surface of the proposal that this could ultimately prevent delegates from the South (or developing nations), from having any say on matters of Doctrine or Church Discipline, or homosexuality in future Disciplines of The United Methodist Church. While some claim that this action would strengthen the unity of the worldwide Church, it could also fracture the unity of the Church by allowing individual Churches across the world to develop their own views on matters of Doctrine and personal morality. The delegates of the 2008 General Conference should be cautious indeed about approving such proposed legislation.

We live in a time where the historical creeds and Church Doctrine are under attack. As modern day Gnostics attempt to radically revise the faith of the Church, it is a great time to be a part of The Confessing Movement, for we believe in the authority of the Scripture and in Jesus Christ as Son, Savior and Lord. ■

“ON LIVING THE UNITED METHODIST WAY”

By Dr. Riley Case

The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church at their November meeting issued a call to action on four items: challenging United Methodists to live “the United Methodist Way,” to start new churches across the globe, to reach and care for children throughout the world, and to lead the effort to stamp out killer diseases of malaria and HIV/AIDS.

The call to “live the United Methodist way” in “public witness and be a community of believers who offer hope to the world” is an especially intriguing thought. The bishops did not spell out what they believe this means but, in true United Methodist style, they are evidently working through a task force to clarify the meaning of “living the United Methodist way.”

The task force should not lack for precedents in our tradition. The very word “Methodist” was originally a term of derision, linking Wesley and his friends to a “methodical” disciplined life which included, among other things, caring for the poor. From there Methodists appealed to the doctrine of holiness, which had to do with purity of heart. John Wesley also gave us the General Rules, which were so much a part of Methodist life they were incorporated into the church’s constitution. The Rules exhort Methodists first to do no harm (complete with a list of items that spell out what that means) and then “to do good” (also with an accompanying list). A fresh interpretation of the General Rules for our day would be most welcome.

Methodists in America developed their own unique lifestyle. When Peter Cartwright described the Methodists of 200 years ago in America he reported (see *Autobiography*, p. 61), among other things, that Methodists “dressed plain...attended their meetings faithfully...wore no jewelry, no ruffles...religiously kept the Sabbath day...abstained from dram-drinking...did not attend balls or plays...fasted once a week.” That is obviously not the direc-

tion the bishops want to go today, but it is worth noting that when Methodists were known for how they lived they were increasing in America from 2% of the religious population to 33% (from 1784 to 1850).

Is “living the United Methodist way” up for discussion? With some concern we note that there seems to be no distinguishing marks of a United Methodist today, at least in regard to morality, lifestyle, and behavior. Indeed, the recent emphasis on “inclusivism” leaves little room for behavioral standards or morality, and certainly little room for discipline. “Inclusivism” accepts everyone and everything without judgment.

But surely United Methodists can do better than that. Believing that living “the United Methodist way” is an important topic, let me start the discussion with what I would call some covenant expectations in how we might fashion our lives together as United Methodists:

1) We will be known for integrity in all of our personal and business dealings.

2) We will hold all human life in highest regard and treat all human beings with highest respect since we believe every human being is created in the image of God. This includes life in the womb.

3) As befits the servant life and as good stewards of what has been entrusted to us, we will avoid ostentatious living.

4) We will oppose the use of alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs.

5) In matters of sexual morality, we will commit ourselves to celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage.

6) Believing we are called to care for God’s created earth, we will seek to be environmentally sensitive and responsible.

7) We will seek justice in all societal relationships.

8) Whether by word or deed, we will give witness to God’s redeeming love in Jesus Christ. ■

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**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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