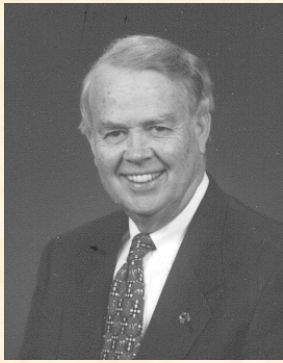


WE CONFESS

Vol. 14 Issue 2- A newsletter of The Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church—March/April 2008



Dr. Eddie Fox

“HOLDING FAST” Reflections by H. Eddie Fox for General Conference 2008

We who are members of the United Methodist Church belong to a world family of “the people called Methodist.” John Wesley’s last letter to America, February 1, 1791 (the year of his death) included the following:

“Lose no opportunity of declaring to all men that the Methodists are one People in all the world and that it is their full determination so to continue.”

We do not ever meet in isolation but always in the context of this world wide communion of persons who are followers of Christ Jesus in the company of the Wesleys. I have met persons who think that we in the United Methodist Church meet with our own concerns as if it does not matter in the larger context.

Through the grace of God the Methodist Movement, including the United Methodist Church, has been raised up to do their part in spreading the good news of Christ Jesus in a world that desperately needs healing, hope and salvation. The General Conference of the United Meth-

odist Church will be meeting in 2008 during the month of the 270th Anniversary of Wesley’s Aldersgate experience. This transforming experience of Wesley launched a revival and renewal in the world that continues to this day. Within one year Wesley embarked on an evangelistic, holistic mission that radically changed persons, society and the world.

Nearly fifty years later, in 1786, Wesley in a moment of reflection or declaration wrote an article, “Thoughts about Methodism.” In this article is the famous quote from Wesley:

“I do not fear that the people called Methodist shall ever cease to exist either in Europe or America, I only fear that they shall exist as a dead sect having the form of religion, but not the power thereof, and that undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.”

These words are very important words for the United Methodist Church during the upcoming General Conference.

HOLDING FAST TO DOCTRINE

It matters what we believe and practice. Sometimes we act as if we are governed by a collection of opinions rather than a centered, rooted dynamic confession of faith grounded in the authority of Scripture. We have declared, “Our preaching and teaching were grounded in Scripture, informed by Christian tradition, enlivened in experience, and tested by reason.” (Discipline, p.41)

A few years ago, the General Conference in “Holy Conferencing,” made it very clear that in matters of doctrine

and practice, Scripture is primary. Our unity is in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus, the “Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1: 14) We see the fullness of Christ, amazing grace and abiding truth. Our actions in General Conference must reflect grace and truth.

We declare that we “confess belief in the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This confession embraces

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the biblical witness to God's activity in creation, encompasses God's gracious self-involvement in the dramas of history, and anticipates the consummation of God's reign. The created order is designed for the well-being of all creatures and as the place of human dwelling in covenant with God." Discipline, p.43

It is out of this central affirmation that we in past General Conferences have stated clearly our conviction that we must live in harmony with the order of creation. It is a word that our society and world needs to hear. God created the world and declared it good, and Jesus affirmed that in the beginning the one who made them, "made them male and female." It is from the central doctrine of the order of creation that we hold fast to our conviction that "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all, and we will seek to live together in Christian

community." (Discipline, p101) This affirmation of the order of creation defines our understanding of human sexuality.

The central affirmation of the order of creation is the foundation for our care for the earth as stewards and gives focus to the mandate of the Great Commission, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." Mark 16:15

In all matters of doctrine and practice we must reflect grace and truth. It is the amazing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which makes possible our redemption and being reconciled to God, and it is the truth which makes us free indeed. In all "Holy Conferencing," it is absolutely imperative to "speak the truth in love." When we meet at General Conference we will stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, and we shall seek to be a faithful people in our time... faithful to amazing grace and abiding truth."

HOLDING FAST TO DISCIPLINE

It is interesting that our book which incorporates the way we order our lives as a people is called the Book of Discipline. Discipline is the way we order our lives individually and the way we order our lives as a community of believers. It is the way we structure ourselves for ministry. In the beginning of our movement, we were structured as a missionary people in a missionary church in a mission situation. The Church was born in a mission situation and the Church today finds itself in a mission situation. At the first conferences of the Methodist Church in North America, preachers were assigned to territories, rather than to churches. At the Methodist Conference in Baltimore in 1784, a preacher was assigned to the Holston Territory, my home conference. The preacher wrote in his journal, "I head to Holston. There is not much money in Holston. I do not have any clothing in one piece. I am finely mounted and I am happy in the Lord." It was that passion and zeal that characterized this movement around the world. Today some parts of the United Methodist Church continue with this zeal and passion to "spread the good news of Christ Jesus." There are other parts that have lost this clear vision. The United Methodist Church in North America has

slowly declined for 40 years and four decades is long enough.

It is encouraging to me that in the Four Areas of Focus being advanced for our coming General Conference by the Bishops and the Connectional Table, that we are serious about being missionary congregations in this new millennium. This is an urgent moment for the church to be about the central task of "making disciples of Christ Jesus." We cannot continue business as usual and fulfill the demands of the four foci for the United Methodist Church.

- Leadership
- Congregational Development, particularly starting New Congregations
- Elimination of poverty
- Global Health

This is a key matter coming before us in this General Conference. We must be today a missionary people as we were in our beginning.

The Covenant that we make together matters. We must not confuse the welcome for all into the fellow-

ship of our church with the covenant that we make in becoming members of our church. We do affirm that God's grace in Christ Jesus is available for all for healing, forgiveness, conversion and transformation. And Wesley insisted that evangelical faith should manifest itself in evangelical living. The emphasis on the Wesleyan way of living means that the vows we take in becoming professing members matter as we live together in Christian community under the Lordship of Christ Jesus.

The Discipline matters. It is our covenant with one another as to how we shall live and serve Christ Jesus in the world. Therefore, one of the greatest and im-

portant matters facing us at the General Conference is the election of Judicial Council members who will hold fast to the strict interpretation of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church.

We hold fast to the Discipline with which we first set out. It is our DNA as a people to be passionately committed to the proclamation of the Gospel through word, deed and sign. We as one part of the Christian community cannot do it all, but we must, by the grace of God do our part so "That the World May Know Jesus Christ!"

HOLDING FAST TO THE SPIRIT

When the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, comes something happens. The people who gathered in the Upper Room in the name of Christ Jesus were about to embark on mission impossible. If they had called in an outside consultant to analyze their situation and study the feasibility of their mission, they would have never left the room. The Holy Spirit came and the church began its global mission.

The vision from the day of Pentecost is that the church is global. God speaks and understands all languages. The church is global and seeks to spread the good news of Christ Jesus in a multicultural, multi-religious, non-religious world on the day of Pentecost and today in the Third Millennium.

It is interesting to note that Wesley's first sermon in the open air in 1739 began with the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." When the Holy Spirit comes we are sent forth with the good news of healing and hope to the ends of the earth.

This is our heritage. The Methodist Movement is global. The World Methodist Communion is in more than 138 countries with 76 million in the family of the Wesleyan tradition. The United Methodist Church at this time has central conferences in the Philippines,

Europe, and Africa. In addition there are many churches that have a distinct connection to the United Methodist Church through their roots which are traced back to this church.

This is an important matter. There is a proposal to change the Constitution of the United Methodist Church in order to have a Central (proposed name change to Regional) in the USA. The proponents of this proposal state that it only permits a Central Conference in the USA, but in reality it mandates that there shall be Central (Regional) Conferences. However, the proposal states that the Jurisdictional Conferences shall continue to be in the USA. In the Discipline the responsibilities of the Central and Jurisdictional conferences are redundant with the result of a wheel within a wheel in the structure.

This is not responsible legislation for us to take at this General Conference. This is not the time for us to be creating national entities. We have witnessed what has taken place in other communions when national bodies decided their own course in matters of doctrine and practice. The United Methodist Church has grown in Asia, Eastern Europe and especially Africa. All persons are needed at the table when decisions are made for the United Methodist Church. The issues before the church today are global in their implications. The wisdom, commitment and integrity of the international delegates must be at the table for the decisions of our

church. There are those who advocate that each Region should be able to write their own covenants in the ordering of ministry, discipleship and Social Principles. We have noted that this has taken place in some Central Conferences. This will be divisive in our movement.

These matters belong to the whole church and as one African delegate said to me, "I want to be present when decisions are made for the United Methodist Church." Let us continue to reflect together what it means to be a global church. But we should not change the Constitution as the first course of action. We should seek ways to strengthen the connection with Autonomous Methodist Congregation with roots in United Methodism. And especially we must find expanded ways, especially through the World Methodist Communion of walking side by side with our brothers and sisters in the Wesleyan way in the 138 countries around the world.

The world is our parish and it belongs to all of us together. And let us remember the last words of Wesley to the people in the Methodist Movement in America not long before his death: "Lose no opportunity of declaring to all men that the Methodists are one people in all the world and that it is their full determination so to con-

tinue."

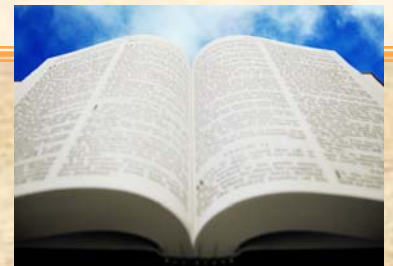
Wherever we find the Movement alive today in the world, we find a people who are open to the Holy Spirit. In my first visit to our Methodist Church in Bulgaria nearly two decades ago, I was moved deeply by the depth of their commitment and the spirit in their worship. I noted that each time we closed the worship service with the benediction that the blessing was followed by singing a chorus together. It was a key affirmation for the people who had been through so much suffering and oppression for many years. As I listened to them sing this refrain, I recognized the tune from my days in my home church in Appalachia. They sang these words as the doxology to their blessing of the benediction:

Hallelujah! Thine the Glory.
Hallelujah! Amen
Hallelujah! Thine the Glory
Revive us again!

May these words of our people, who lived a life of martyrdom to a ministry of mission, be a reminder to us. May this be our prayer for the General Conference in 2008. ■

Devotional on the Bible

By Dr. Bill Bouknight



Often when we read a familiar verse in Scripture, the Holy Spirit reveals a new truth.

Recently I was reading Jesus' response to Satan's first of the famous desert temptations. In Matthew 4:4 we read, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone but on **EVERY WORD** that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Suddenly it occurred to me that Jesus was making a claim about the entire Bible. In the following chapter, Matthew 5, Jesus said, "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." JESUS WAS EXPRESSING A VERY HIGH VIEW OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

That set me to searching the Bible to see what the Bible says about itself. Psalm 12, verse 6, makes a huge claim: "The word of the Lord is flawless." Then in Psalm 19:7, there it is again: "The law of the Lord is perfect." Then in Proverbs 30, verse 5, there it is again: "Every word of God is flawless."

The prophet Isaiah makes a similar claim in chapter 40: "The grass withers and the flowers fail, but the word of our God stands forever." This verse is quoted word for word by St. Peter in the New Testament, in First Peter 1, verse 24.

I have already quoted Jesus on this matter in Matthew 4 and 5. But Jesus said more. In Mark 13 we read: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Furthermore, in Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John

17, our Lord prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

St. Peter in his second letter wrote these words about biblical authority: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (II Peter 1:20)

We often turn to St. Paul for the final word on Scriptural authority. In his second letter to Timothy, chapter 3, he wrote: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good word.”

Now Paul meant this to apply primarily to the Old Testament, but not exclusively so. In Second Peter, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17, St. Peter makes a statement about Paul’s letters: “His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, **AS THEY DO TO OTHER SCRIPTURES**, to their own destruction.”

Note that St. Peter and other church leaders recognized even in the First Century that some contemporary writings were of equal status with Old Testament writings.

With this biblical material in mind, let me make a point. While many observers think that homosexuality will be the pivotal issue for the UMC at the 2008 General Conference, actually that is not really true. There is a more fundamental issue beneath that one. The real issue is the authority of Scripture.

Sometimes we Methodists suffer from “Baptist-phobia” which is the fear of looking or sounding like Baptists. Do you remember the old advertisements for 7-Up? “We’re the un-cola!” We Methodists almost define ourselves as being the “un-Baptists.” We’ve got to get over that. That fear has made us reluctant to stand up for biblical authority. We don’t have to use Baptist words like “inerrant” or “infallible.” But we need to defend what

our Book of Discipline says, that the Bible is “the true rule and guide for faith and practice.” We can declare with confidence that the Holy Spirit has protected that book from any significant error. In 2000 years not a single claim of Scripture has been proven false.

It’s time we stopped being afraid of being accused of being fundamentalists or “Bible-thumpers.” It’s fine for us to say that we believe in a certain doctrine (like the virgin birth or the resurrection of the body) just because the Bible says so. We don’t have to come up with another reason. And you know, if we ever back away

from depending on the Bible as our basic authority, we are left with nothing but our opinions. Opinions are like navels. Everybody has one and all are of dubious value.

In Billy Graham’s great autobiography, “Just as I am,” he tells about a crucial moment in his ministry. It was 1949, just before his first big crusade in Los Angeles. Billy was troubled. He had read some scholarly attacks on the Scripture. He was wondering if the Bible was

completely true and could he preach it without doubt. He was at a camp in the San Bernardino Mountains. One night he could not sleep, so he went out and walked in the darkness. Finally he knelt and said something like this to God. “Father, there are many things in this book I do not understand. There are some seeming contradictions. There are some areas in it that do not seem to correlate with modern science. But Father, I am going to accept this book as your word, by faith. I’m going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be your inspired word.”

Remembering that night years later, Billy wrote, “When I got up from my knees that August night, my eyes stung with tears. I sensed the power and presence of God. Not all my questions were answered, but a major bridge had been crossed. I knew that a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.”

If any of us are still squishy about really trusting in biblical authority, let’s get over it now. Let’s proclaim boldly what our book of Discipline declares: “The Bible is the true rule and guide for faith and practice.” ■

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
(II Peter 1:20)

BY WHAT NAME SHALL WE BAPTIZE?

By: Dr. Riley Case

Inclusivism as religious ideology has been around for several decades now. When it is at its best inclusivism has reminded us that since God shows no partiality, we should make sure that our language and actions show no partiality. Christian sensitivity should avoid stereotypes based on gender, race, nationality, or economic class.

The problem presents itself when inclusivism attempts to tinker with Biblical language and the historic Christian faith. It is one thing to be reminded that the Bible sometimes uses feminine images for God. It is another thing to deconstruct revealed truth in the name of ideology.

So with the names for God, or, more specifically, with the way we speak of the triune God. Modern feminism is unhappy with names, pronouns or titles for God that are masculine. This feminism insists that the language should be neutered, or feminine names and pronouns should get equal time. We have discussed and debated these things for a number of years now.

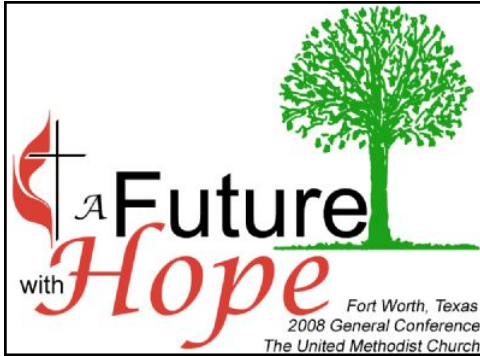
The issue is much more serious when the inclusivist ideology would impose itself on the sacraments and the church ritual. Some inclusivists would substitute words like “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer” for “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” in baptism, in ordination, in prayers, and in the church’s liturgy. For those who seek to be faithful to the Scriptures and the tradition of the church this must be understood as unacceptable.

But it is being done. In the more liberal denominations it is being done regularly. It is done in the United Methodist Church by liberal clergy, despite the fact that the United Methodist *Discipline* specifically prescribes the use of the Trinitarian formula, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” for baptism (and in ordination and other rituals as well). The question then must be raised whether baptism with a “made-up” name for God is even valid.

There might not be a problem if United Methodists were not trying, these days, to take baptism (and ordination) more seriously. The church has studied baptism, has adopted a new baptism statement, has declared the importance and necessity of baptism, and has even argued that re-baptism shall not be performed by United Methodist pastors. Our newer understanding argues that baptism is not just a symbol but a means of grace. But what if “baptism” is not really baptism? The church has already decided that persons coming to United Methodism from Mormonism must be re-baptized because the Mormon baptism is not valid.

The issue is before us more seriously because of a Vatican ruling announced on February 29, 2008. The Roman Catholic Church has ruled that substitute names for God render baptism invalid. Referring specifically to “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,” the church’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has indicated anyone having been “baptized” by that substitute formula should be re-baptized. For canonical purposes, such persons should be considered unbaptized. Since baptism is linked to salvation in the Roman Catholic Church this ruling has serious implications, not just for Roman Catholics but for all those churches who seek closer ties with the Roman Church. (The statement also comments that only in America does this seem to be a problem.)

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Dear Friends of The Confessing Movement:

When John Paul II was elected Pope he stood on a balcony and spoke to the throng in St. Peter's square and to the world. His first words were, "BE NOT AFRAID!" These were the words he spoke when he first came to America. "BE NOT AFRAID!" In his last trip to America in 1995 where he spoke in Central Park, New York City, he spoke these words again, "BE NOT AFRAID!"

I use these words in this letter because, though we face dangerous challenges in The United Methodist Church as we approach General Conference, we have a deep faith in the presence of our Lord that He is with us. This is His Church and He is our sure foundation and hope. So, the first thing that we must do as we face General Conference 2008 is to seek His presence, guidance, and wisdom in prayer.

As we pray, we must be aware that some people in our Church would radically change United Methodism.

1. They will seek to get approval for homosexual practices and ordination of practicing homosexuals.
2. They will seek to get approval for the union of practicing homosexuals in Church performed rituals.
3. They will seek to gain legal approval of all abortions including "partial birth" abortions, in other words, infanticide for unwanted babies.
4. They will seek to remove the local Pastor's authority in determining those who are ready for membership in the Church.
5. They will make a strong move to place African, European, and Asian Central Conferences in separate structures and to create an American Central Conference. This will ultimately take away the vote of the orthodox African and Asian Churches and make more possible a radical American Central Conference.

So, our work is cut out for us. Though we should not be afraid, at the same time, we must work to keep United Methodism an Apostolic Church in the future. Some of our leaders will try to demythologize scripture and orthodox theology so that we will be more a Unitarian Church and not a faithful Church. Upholding Jesus as Son, Savior and Lord must be our primary purpose at 2008 General Conference.

Along side the orthodox delegates in the committees and on the conference floor, we must have workers at the conference supporting an orthodox agenda. This will be costly, and your generous gift to The Confessing Movement is needed now! We should not be afraid, but we must be faithful in support of an Apostolic Church at the 2008 General Conference. Thanks! So very much!

For the Cause of causes,
Dr. John Ed Mathison

Yes, I want to help support The Confessing Movement efforts at General Conference 2008.

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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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