

WE CONFESS



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WHO SHOULD DEFINE MARRIAGE?

By Dr. Bill Bouknight

On August 12, U.S. District Judge Vaughn Walker struck down a California constitutional amendment approved by seven million voters affirming the biblical definition of marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman. Judge Walker, while proposing to extend the privilege of marriage to homosexuals, is in reality trying to redefine marriage. He stated in his decision that the ban on homosexual marriage "exists as an artifact of a time when the genders were seen as having distinct roles in society and in marriage. That time has passed... Gender no longer forms an essential part of marriage." Not only did Judge Walker redefine mar-

riage; he also criticized those who because of religious convictions support heterosexual marriage. He wrote, "Religious beliefs that gay and lesbian relationships are sinful or inferior to heterosexual relationships harm gays and lesbians." Not since the Roe v. Wade decision of 1973, which led to fifty million deaths of unborn babies, has an American judge so blatantly attacked a biblical standard.

Nothing could be clearer or more explicit than the biblical definition of marriage, stated in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus affirmed this fundamental truth when he said, "**HAVEN'T YOU READ THAT AT THE BEGINNING THE**

CREATOR MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, AND SAID, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN WILL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE UNITED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH'?" (Matthew 19:4-5)

Marriage was not created by government. It is God-given and God-defined, and is the central institution in human civilization. If government can redefine marriage, there may be no limit on how far the new definition could stray from the biblical one. Once the court detaches marriage from its original, biblical definition, there can be no restrictions on it unless some form of

(cont. on page 2)

“Thousands of cases make their way through the Federal courts each year. Some are important, but only a few has lasting legal significance. Whatever happens on appeal, the decision handed down yesterday (August 12) by Judge Vaughn R. Walker will reverberate for decades to come. Yesterday, a very important gavel fell on marriage. The central institution of human civilization suffered a direct hit, and its future hangs in the balance.”

(By Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)

(Bouknight, Cont.)

*“Righteousness
exalts a nation,
but sin is a
disgrace to
any people.”*

(Proverbs 14:34)

marriage can be proven to be detrimental to society. But how could one prove that the bisexual's or polygamist's desires for two or more marriage partners are detrimental to society?

Though the biblical definition of marriage is clear and explicit, some Christians, even some United Methodists, choose a cultural version rather than the biblical one. Prior to the 2008 General Conference, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society attempted to persuade the delegates to redefine marriage as a relationship “between two consenting adults.” Thankfully, General Conference rejected that proposal.

On this fundamental issue of marriage, the church must stand firm. God will bring judgment on any cul-

ture, nation, or church that deviates from such a clearly defined standard. I cringe when I consider that “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men...”

(Romans 1:18) I fear for my beloved country when I read the words of King Solomon: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34)

Judge Walker has leveled an unprecedented attack against the central institution of human civilization. In reaction, we must speak the truth in love, though we will probably be called bigots, homophobes, and other derogatory names. On a matter so clear and biblically explicit, the Council of Bishops should speak out boldly. Paragraph 161B of the *Book*

of Discipline makes The United Methodist position very clear---“We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” If The United Methodist Church ever rejects God's plan for marriage, many of its members, with good reason, will seek another church.

We must pray for the Supreme Court of the United States which will be asked to rule on this vital issue.

Meanwhile, we must contend for the truth while refusing to demonize those who differ from us. Remembering that we are sinners saved by grace, we must hate all sin while loving all sinners. My prayer is that one day America will repent, not only for the destruction of fifty million unborn babies but also for attempts to undermine God's design for marriage. •

JUDICIAL COUNCIL EXAMINES PASTORAL DISCRETION WITH RESPECT TO MEMBERSHIP AGAIN

*Rev. Keith Boyette, Pastor in Virginia and Former Member
of the Judicial Council (2000-2008)*

The Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church, our denomination's supreme court, will meet in New Orleans from October 27-30, for its fall session. Typical of a session at the mid-point of the quadrennium, the Council has a heavy docket of 31 matters. Six of those 31 docket items ask the Council to reconsider or change its 2005 ruling in Decision 1032, in which the Judicial Council declared that the *Book of Discipline* “invested discretion in the pastor-in-charge to make the determination of a person's readiness to affirm the vows of membership.”

Four of the docket items addressing the issue of pastoral discretion with respect to membership originate from the Northern Illinois Annual Conference. While both membership and the powers of pastors are both distinctly connectional matters and the Constitution grants exclusive authority to legislate in those areas, the Northern Illinois Annual Conference enacted policies at its session that sought to eliminate discretion of pastors with respect to membership. The Conference is asking the Judicial Council to declare that these policies are permissible under the *Discipline*. The Minnesota Annual Conference asks for a declaratory decision on the “standing of Decision 1032” in light of various provisions of the *Discipline*. None of these docket items appear to satisfy the jurisdictional requirements of the Judicial Council which would mean that the Council cannot reach the issues raised by each item. The Arkansas Annual Con-

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(Boyette, continued)

ference, as well as Northern Illinois, asks the Judicial Council to reconsider Decision 1032 on its own motion.

Among other matters on the docket, the Judicial Council is asked to:

- Permit each annual conference to adopt its own definition of the term "status" in ¶ 4 of the Constitution (Northern Illinois seeks to include sexual orientation and transgender identity in the definition of status);
- Approve an action of the New York Annual Conference which seeks to permit clergy to be partners in a same sex marriage where such marriage is permitted by secular law;
- Review actions of the Kentucky Annual Conference related to its supervision of a retired elder;
- Address issues related to an annual conference's policy concerning clergy and lay sexual misconduct (Baltimore-Washington), to the repayment of Ministerial Education Fund Service Loans (Arkansas), to the adoption of the annual conference budget (Indiana), to the election of general and jurisdictional conference delegates (South Carolina and Iowa), to the consultation process during the appointment of pastors (North Alabama), to establishment of a provisional annual conference by a central conference, to discontinuance of a local church (California-Nevada), to remedial action required as part of an elder's voluntary leave of absence (Baltimore-Washington), to re-election of an annual conference trustee (Philippines), to expenditure of conference funds for purposes prohibited by the *Discipline* (New York), to the right of a clergyperson to trial (Rocky Mountain), to the discontinuance of a provisional elder (Rocky Mountain), to the term-of-office of a central conference bishop, and to a judicial complaint against an incumbent bishop (Philippines).

The decisions of the Judicial Council will be announced in early November. A complete copy of the docket for the Fall 2010 session can be reviewed at www.umc.org in the Judicial Council section.

“THE BORN-AGAIN, MARKETING CHURCH HAS CALCULATED THAT UNLESS IT MAKES DEEP, SERIOUS CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS, IT WILL GO OUT OF BUSINESS, ESPECIALLY WITH THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS. WHAT IT HAS NOT CONSIDERED CAREFULLY ENOUGH IS THAT IT MAY WELL BE PUTTING ITSELF OUT OF BUSINESS WITH GOD.”

FROM “THE COURAGE TO BE PROTESTANT” BY DAVID WELLS



SHOULD WE SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER RELIGIONS?

By Dr. Bill Bouknight

A dangerous heresy has slipped into The United Methodist Church in recent years and now threatens the basic foundation for evangelism. It is the belief that all major religions are equally valid pathways to God and salvation. The implication of that heresy is that no Christian should share the gospel with an adherent of another religion.

This heresy is promoted by a misunderstood article in the United Methodist Book of Resolutions entitled "Our Muslim Neighbors." By the way, General Conference delegates, pressed for time and short on energy, often give little attention to items approved for the Book of Resolutions because that book does not have force of law like the *Discipline* does. However, General Boards often use (and sometimes misuse) these resolutions to portray the official position of The United Methodist Church.

A good example is the lengthy resolution entitled "Our Muslim Neighbors" (OMN). In an article in the July 30, 2010 issue of *UM Reporter*, writer Susan Hogan stated, "UM policy, set forth in OMN, makes it clear that converting Muslims to Christianity is not the goal of interfaith work." Then a United Methodist pastor in Chicago was quoted, saying, "I didn't want to convert Muslims. Because my mother was a Muslim, and I knew how deeply the people loved God."

Most readers would conclude from those statements that United Methodists do not believe in sharing the gospel with Muslims or hoping that they will convert to Christianity. But that is not true. Look closely at the OMN document. It says this: "Mutual respect requires the church to recognize and affirm that, although individuals may move from one religion to another, we do not enter into formal interfaith dialogue with the intent to convert the Muslim community to Christianity." In other words, we are talk-

ing only about FORMAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE, not our day-by-day relations with Muslims. Indeed, elsewhere in the OMN document, it states that we should "remain mindful of the evangelism imperatives of the gospel..."

United Methodists should be willing and eager to share the gospel with all persons, whether they are followers of another religion or not. Why? Because our Bible teaches that all of us are sinners who need to be saved? The only biblically endorsed way to sal-

vation comes through repentance for sin and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In I John 5:12-13, we read, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have life eternal."

During the first years of the Early Church, the only evangelistic target was the Jews. Later God taught His church to share the gospel with Gentiles too.

The Early Church would have been shocked to have witnessed the recent fracas in Chicago where liberal Christians denounced Southern Baptists for intentionally seeking to share the gospel with Jews.

Article XX of our United Methodist Articles of Religion states the essential truth of the matter: "The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone."

But you may be thinking that it is rather narrow-minded to believe that Christians have a corner on truth that other religions do not have. If those are your thoughts, your argument is with the Bible, the book that we United Methodists believe to be "the true rule and guide for faith and practice." In the Bible are these truths:

"The only biblically endorsed way to salvation comes through repentance for sin and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."

- Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” (John 10:9)
- St. Peter declared, “...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed...Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:10, 12)
- Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19)

Followers of all religions except Christianity have one thing in common—they do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, or that his death was an atoning sacrifice for sin, or that he physically arose from the dead. Yet Jesus said, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.” (John 6:40) If we truly love all persons, we surely want them to have eternal life. Therefore, we must share the gospel with every person who gives us an opportunity. But Christians must be humble and sensitive in sharing the faith, never imposing our faith upon another person or being judgmental or condescending. In the words of D.T. Niles, we must share the Gospel “as one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.”•

MANDELA’S WAY: FIFTEEN LESSONS ON LIFE, LOVE, AND COURAGE

By Richard Stengel, Random House: New York, 2009

(Reviewed by Dr. Bill Bouknight)

Richard Stengel, Editor of Time magazine, spent many months in close fellowship with Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa. His book about his hero is instructive because it analyzes the lessons that life taught Mandela and that Mandela taught South Africans and the world.

The 27 years that Mandela spent in prison became the crucible that both hardened him and burned away all that was extraneous. The Mandela who emerged from prison at age 71 was a different man than the Mandela who went in at age 44. Stengel calls Mandela “a man of one principle: equal rights for all, regardless of race, class, or gender. Pretty much everything else is a tactic.”

The portrait of Mandela painted by Stengel is of a courageous hero who transcends race. Mandela himself says, “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal rights.”

There is sadness too in the portrait of Mandela. Both of his marriages failed. And he seems to have lacked a religious faith. According to Stengel, Mandela “distrusts anything he cannot touch and for years avoided any reference to or reliance on a higher power. .. He did not pray; he pondered and then acted.”

Nevertheless, Mandela will forever be remembered as a kind of founding father of South Africa, not unlike George Washington, who remained confident and heroic despite enormous suffering. •



THE CRUX OF THE CLAREMONT CONTROVERSY

By: Dr. Bill Bouknight

United Methodism's Claremont School of Theology is transforming itself into a multifaith center for the training of clergy. In a June 9th press conference, leaders of the school formally announced the "University Project," which will add programs to train Muslim imams and Jewish rabbis. Programs to train Buddhist and Hindu religious leaders are to be added in the future.

Claremont's President Jerry Campbell claims that this Project will benefit United Methodist seminarians by making them more aware of the foundations of other religions. Dr. Campbell did not explain why seminarians could not gain similar understanding by inviting guest imams and rabbis to speak or by sponsoring visits to mosques and synagogues.

As is often the case, the crux of this matter is slightly below the surface. President Campbell hinted at it when he said that Christians who feel they need to evangelize persons of other faiths have "an incorrect perception of what it means to follow Jesus."

The initiative at Claremont is to champion the liberal view that all religions are equally valid paths to God. Christianity is not better or distinctive. Supporting this viewpoint are the following liberal assumptions: the focus should be on this world rather than on eternity. Despite what the Bible says, ideas of sin, judgment, wrath of God, and hell are invalid. If there is life after death, it will be heaven only; hell is rejected, even though Jesus talked about it often. No one needs to be saved or born

again. The cross has little or no place in this new theology. Instead, all attention should be given to improving this world, teaching people to share resources and to express love and tolerance. If all religions will just cooperate in this endeavor, world peace and universal harmony will gradually arrive.

Orthodox United Methodists know that Scripture and the *Book of Discipline* directly contradict Claremont's assumptions. Jesus did not say that he represented one among many ways to know God. He did say, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Our United Methodist *Book of Discipline* does not claim that Jesus Christ is one of several ways to God. Article VII of the Confession of Faith declares the uniqueness of Jesus. "We believe man is fallen from righteousness and, apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, is destitute of holiness and inclined to evil. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Claremont's new direction raises a vital question for United Methodists in America. This question was easy for John Wesley to answer but now divides liberals from more orthodox United Methodists—Do Christians have a duty to help God "save" those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

Claremont tries to defend itself by claiming that no United Methodist money will be used to educate imams, rabbis, or clergy of other religions. However, in any

organization it is almost impossible to keep funding streams totally separated. Of even greater importance is the fact that Claremont will lend its name and United Methodist image to the education of religious leaders who will directly contradict the central claims of Christianity. Respect for other religions is generally healthy, but to assist in educating religious leaders whose very vocations demand that they deny the main tenets of the Christian faith is unacceptable.

Claremont's new direction is not a sudden decision; its Board of Trustees affirmed this direction in 2008. A \$10 million gift is available for Claremont's multifaith project. Amazingly, the United Methodist University Senate reviewed Claremont's University Project and approved it.

Currently there are only about 70 United Methodist students at Claremont. Under Claremont's influence, United Methodism has lost about half its membership in California and elsewhere on the West Coast over the last forty years.

Now is the time for The United Methodist Church to set Claremont free from all United Methodist affiliation and funding. To continue investing \$800,000 per year in a school that is no longer distinctively Christian would be a travesty. The United Methodist Church should take that annual allocation of \$800,000 and invest it in places like Africa where United Methodists still have a singular focus on saving souls and making disciples for Jesus Christ. •

“As a twenty-something, I can say with confidence that when it comes to church, we don’t want cool as much as we want real. If we are interested in Christianity in any sort of serious way, it is not because it’s easy or trendy or popular.

It’s because Jesus himself is appealing, and what he says rings true.

It’s because the world we inhabit is utterly phony, ephemeral, narcissistic, image-obsessed and sex-drenched—and we want an alternative.

It’s not because we want more of the same.”

(From “HIPSTER CHRISTIANITY: WHERE CHURCH AND COOL COLLIDE” BY BRETT CRACKEN)

Find Us On Facebook

We know you support the work of The Confessing Movement but we also want you to "like" us.

What we mean is that The Confessing Movement has joined the "social media revolution." In May, 2010, a group of young United Methodists started a Facebook page for us. When you join Facebook, you can find The Confessing Movement's page, and "like" us. This allows you to "join" the page. Once you "like" us, you can get updates, join the discussion through comments, and connect with other people from around the world who also "like" The Confessing Movement.

If you aren't part of Facebook, you have probably 1) been barraged with an overabundance of invites from friends and colleagues who would like you to join and 2) you may wonder what it is all about. Facebook is a social media application on the internet that allows users to connect with others and join groups and causes. Users can update their own status and groups can update their pages.

Since our page was created in May, more than 700 people have "liked" The Confessing Movement. The administrators of the site, two young laity and a young Elder, have kept the page active and updated almost daily. More than 200 of the people who have "liked" our page are from outside the United States. There have been joys lifted up, prayer concerns shared, discussion about the future of our church and conversation about the latest news in the church and around the world.

Facebook is a great way to connect to people from every generation. According to a Pew Research study released in August, social networking use among internet users ages 50 and older nearly doubled—from 22% in April 2009 to 42% in May 2010.

- Between April 2009 and May 2010, social networking use among internet users ages 50-64 grew by 88%—from 25% to 47%.
- During the same period, use among those ages 65 and older grew 100%—from 13% to 26%.
- By comparison, social networking use among users ages 18-29 grew by 13%—from 76% to 86%."

Every generation is using social media, including Facebook. Our Facebook page seeks to reach every generation with updates and news from The Confessing Movement. "The world is our parish," said John Wesley. Facebook is helping us reach the world.

We hope you will connect with The Confessing Movement through our Facebook page.
Follow the updates and join the conversation. •

**The Confessing Movement
within The United Methodist Church**

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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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