

TEACHING: THE ANSWER TO A CRISIS

This historical note is a wonderful reminder of God's providence over His Church, including The United Methodist Church, through history—and now. It is from "Reading the Gospels with Benedict XVI" (First Things, October 2011) by Dr. Bruce D. Marshall, Lehman Professor of Christian Doctrine at Perkins School of Theology (Southern Methodist University).

"When Gregory I came to the See of Peter in 590, the future of the Catholic Church—and whether the Church would have a future—was far from clear, and the papacy had little by way of worldly power to confront the crisis. The Church was besieged from without and troubled by dissension within. Rome lay in ruins about him, its population less than a tenth of what it had been during the closing days of imperial glory two centuries before. The barbarian tribes vying for control of Italy and much of the rest of Europe were either Arian or pagan, without loyalty to Rome and the papacy. And they were literally at the gates. One of the most important acts of Gregory's pontificate was to negotiate a peace with the Lombard chieftain Agilulf, saving Rome from complete destruction.

"To a large extent Gregory the Great met the problems of his time simply by teaching the faith. In sermons, pastoral instructions, exegetical works, and lives of the saints, he sought to display the inherent beauty of Christianity and of lives shaped by the gospel. He made no claim to originality but merely presented the core teaching of the Church, the faith of Nicaea and Chalcedon, of Augustine and the Church Fathers, and did so in a clear, precise, and attractive manner. His originality lay at the level of particulars, a by-product of his extensive effort to teach in his own time what he had received from Scripture and the Fathers."

Would that our bishops—even a few of them—heeded the example of Gregory the Great. (PTS)♥

MURDER, CULTURE, AND DIGNITY

We are from Kansas. Western Kansas. Garden City, Kansas. When she was a high-school student, Marsha, my wife, moved with her family from Wichita to Garden City. Years before that, when I was about ready for kindergarten, my family had settled in the same town.

Back in the 1950s, Garden City was a tree-covered

town of 10,000 residents. It was a good community in which to grow up. From the vantage point of a boy, the character-building institutions in town seemed quite strong. Families thrived. Jobs for fathers (and some mothers) were plentiful, or so it appeared. Churches were numerous. Schools were demanding enough. Scouts were active. Businesses and services were dependable. Playing the seasonal sports, hunting, fishing, and hiking were things we boys did on the weekends and during the summers.

Then, in 1959 near Garden City, a horrendous crime occurred that immediately captured the attention of much of America. The Clutter family—composed of Herb and Bonnie, Nancy (16) and Kenyon (15)—was murdered in Holcomb, Kansas, a few miles west of Garden City. It happened late on a Saturday night in mid-November. The Clutters were members of my family's church, First Methodist Church of Garden City. When the gruesome murders were first discovered early that Sunday morning, our church's pastor was called to the scene of the crime. Later that morning, at the beginning of our church's Service of Worship, I recall that the pastor stood in the pulpit, announced to the congregation the evil that had been visited upon the Clutters, and canceled the remainder of the worship service. Such an announcement and such a cancellation were not forgotten by that nine-year-old boy.

One of my best boyhood friends in town was Paul Dewey. Paul's father, Mr. Alvin Dewey, worked for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation and was assigned to the case.

Since the murders received immediate attention in the New York Times, numerous journalists and writers came to Garden City to cover the crimes and the developing investigation. Among them was the famous writer, Truman Capote, who was accompanied by research assistant Harper Lee, who would author the novel To Kill a Mockingbird (J. B. Lippincott & Co.). In due course, Richard Hickock and Perry Smith were charged with the crimes, arrested, held in the Garden City jail, tried, found guilty, sentenced to death by hanging, driven to the prison in Lansing, KS, imprisoned on death row, and executed.

CULTURAL COMMENTARY

There is no shortage of cultural commentary on this crime. From thousands of pages of notes, Truman Capote wrote In Cold Blood (Random House, 1965). Then came the movie, "In Cold Blood" (1967), which starred Robert

Blake, John Forsythe, and Scott Wilson. More recently, "Capote" (2005), another movie, appeared. And most recently, Charles Shields' Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee (Henry Holt and Co., 2006), which contains much information on the crimes against the Clutters and on the writing of In Cold Blood, was published.

Along with most of my high-school friends, I saw the movie when it was first released. But for years, suspecting that the author had taken a condescending approach toward our hometown and its citizens, I resisted reading Capote's work of historical fiction. Finally, in the late 1980s, I read the book and found it to be respectful of western Kansas and western Kansans. A hardback copy of the book was given to me, by a brother at St. Peter's United Methodist Church in Morehead City, NC, not many years ago. Then, thanks to the mother of a sister at St. Peter's Church, we were loaned a copy of Mockingbird, which amply covers Lee's time in Kansas. Last summer, with renewed interest in the Clutter story, we purchased and watched both of the movies "In Cold Blood" and "Capote."

THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Why mention all of this in Lifewatch? Because the murder of the four Clutters was a disturbing, disgusting, violent violation of the God-given dignity of the human person. Because of this violation, "in cold blood," news was written and read, spoken and heard. In addition, books were authored and pondered, and movies were produced and watched. It is a horrible incident, in American history, that should not be forgotten.

Living in the United States in the early part of the twenty-first century, we might well forget the very real power of the moral claim of the dignity of the human person. David Brog, in his excellent and engaging book In Defense of Faith: The Judeo-Christian Idea and the Struggle for Humanity (Encounter Books, 2010), does not let us forget this claim: "The radical idea at the root of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that all human beings are created in the image of God. Both Judaism and Christianity therefore stress the sanctity and equality of *all* humans. Even more importantly, these faiths demand not merely that we recognize the value of our neighbors, but also that we love them and act on this love by serving them. From the Judeo-Christian perspective, the neighborhood grows to encompass the entire world, and the ingroup swells and swallows all outgroups. Hated strangers become beloved brothers." (p. xiii)

Again, the cold-blooded murder of the Clutter family is morally revolting. It is morally revolting because armed, violent men attacked unarmed, defenseless family members. The God-given human dignity of each Clutter was violently assaulted.

Let us remember that abortion involves the same moral dynamics. The strong (the abortion provider) assaults the weak (the unborn child), even though the weak is blessed with God-given humanity. Sad to say, in our time and place, the unborn child is the most frequently threatened, and lethally assaulted, person of all. (Paul T. Stallsworth)♥

THE ANNUAL LIFEWATCH SERVICE OF WORSHIP (9:30 a.m.)

Preaching:

The Reverend Dr. James V. Heidinger II
President and Publisher Emeritus of Good News
Leader/President/Publisher of Good News for 28 Years

THE ANNUAL LIFEWATCH BOARD MEETING (3:00 p.m.)

Both Events on January 23, 2012 (Monday)
at The United Methodist Building
100 Maryland Avenue, NE, Washington, DC

**Fill a van or bus from your church and community,
and join us for these Gospel of Life events.**

ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In mid-June I received a troubling email inquiry at the Lifewatch office. The writer, a supporter of many pro-life causes, had wanted to send us a donation through the website—until he noticed that PayPal was our credit card service provider. He asked if we knew that PayPal supports Planned Parenthood and stated that, because of that association, he could not in good conscience send Lifewatch a donation.

Needless to say, I was disappointed that he could not donate. More importantly, I was troubled by his assertion of a PayPal-Planned Parenthood relationship and decided to investigate. A quick Internet search proved the writer correct. PayPal, which is owned by eBay, does in fact support Planned Parenthood.

(Among many confirming sources, see http://womenofgrace.com/breaking_news/?p=5444/ dated 08/12/10; <http://keeplifelegal.com/2011/01/18/contributors-to-planned-parenthood-update/> dated 01/18/11; and <http://engagefamilyminute.com/2011/01/you-want-to-help-stop-abortion-read-this-and-do-something/> dated 01/13/11. All were accessed on 07/07/11 and a second time on 08/29/11.)

In a telephone conversation, Rev. Stallsworth and I discussed the situation and quickly concluded that Lifewatch must discontinue use of the PayPal service on our website. We cannot knowingly contribute, even indirectly, to any organization that supports Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the United States.

I instructed our webmaster to investigate other options, and upon completion of the necessary paperwork, the Lifewatch website switched to Cornerstone Payment Systems, a life-friendly credit card service provider. Although PayPal may have forwarded only pennies per donation to Planned Parenthood, pennies add up to dollars, dollars which support and provide abortion. Anything we can do to save unborn lives and end abortion, we must do!

This all happened because one person asked one question.

The next time you are asked to stand strong for life, when you feel overwhelmed or that your actions do not matter, remember this incident. One person can make a difference!

Be prepared, in defense of life. (Cindy Evans)♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

July 16, 2011

Dear Paul:

You are to be congratulated on your excellent letter to the [members of the] Council of Bishops. [To read or reread the letter, see the insert in this issue [Lifewatch](#).] With two retired bishops—and close friends—living here, I want to discuss this with them. However, both are gone for the summer... Back in the fall...

I am still on the road with my Holocaust message—105 times now all over the country. Recently the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC asked me to be a spokesman for them on the road. I was pleased.

I just read Elie Weisel's "Night" of his story as a victim of the Holocaust. Absolutely devastating!

I hope all is well with you and yours.

Shalom,

(The Rev. Dr.) Forrest J. Robinson

1910 Dee Avenue

Winfield, KS 67156-1510

Dr. Robinson is a "retired" United Methodist pastor. His "Holocaust message" is his story of witnessing the liberation of a death camp at the end of World War II. His witness is powerful. It is a testimony to the truth of the dignity of the human person. Several years ago Dr. Robinson spoke at our local District Lay Rally in New Bern, NC. His presentation was deeply appreciated by all in attendance. Please consider inviting him to speak at one of your church, district, or conference events. (PTS)

October 26, 2011

Dear Rev. Stallsworth

Thank you for raising the issue of gender-based abortion in your September newsletter. Regrettably this practice continues to occur in various countries around the globe, and the United Methodist Church [UMC] needs to continue advocating for its cessation. The 1988 General Conference added language to the statement on abortion stating: "We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection." The General Board of Church and Society [GBCS], in its advocacy on this issue at state, national and international levels, clearly articulates this position of the church whenever speaking or writing about the abortion issue and rejects any accusation that GBCS was supportive of gender-based abortion as population control.

It is our hope that the UMC continue exploring ways to reduce the need for abortion. GBCS has put intensive

resources and effort into promoting the use of family planning so parents can choose when and if to have children and be able to space their children which reduces child and maternal mortality. The church stands firm on the importance of comprehensive sex education for young people, which reduces the need for abortion due to young people having the facts to make responsible decisions. Plus, the UMC places high value on the education and empowerment of girls which, too, works to reduce the need for abortion.

These are issues we would hope the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS) would focus upon with the goal of lowering abortion rates in the United States and around the globe.

Sincerely,

Linda Bales Todd, Director, Women's Advocacy, GBCS, lbales@umc-gbcs.org

TUMAS is most grateful for Linda Bales Todd's response to "Missing Women: 163,000,000." I will limit my response, to Ms. Todd, to the matter of gender-selection abortion. Through the years this United Methodist pastor has read a considerable amount of press coverage of the denomination. In all of that reading, I do not remember running across a single report on GBCS advocating in public against gender-selection abortion. I welcome, and would celebrate, evidence to the contrary. (PTS)♥

**LETTERS/COMMENTS TO THE EDITOR:
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YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• All gifts to the ministry of Lifewatch are very much appreciated. Only because of your faithful support can Lifewatch continue to witness to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church and beyond.

If you want to give a gift to Lifewatch, you can do so in three ways: (1) send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338; (2) donate online on our homepage at www.lifewatch.org; and (3) give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans at the Lifewatch office.

Again, our heartfelt thanks to you.

• On September 1, your editor received an email from a long-time friend and subscriber in Florida. He asked, "Does the number of missing women, as a result of abortion, number 1,630,000,000 as in the headline, or 163 million as in the text [in the June 1, 2011 issue of [Lifewatch](#)]? Either way, it's too many."

The answer is 163,000,000—that is, 163 million—women are missing due to abortion. Sorry about the error in the headline by this editor.

• Please do everything you can to attend the Lifewatch Service of Worship on January 23, 2012 at The United

Methodist Building in Washington, DC. The sermon, by The Reverend Dr. James V. Heidinger II, will be instructive, inspiring, and memorable. Most importantly, our Lord of Life will be present in Word and Sacrament. Again, be there!

- Good, strong letters, that encourage the teaching of church doctrine on human sexuality and the use church discipline on violations of the Discipline, have been sent to The United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops and individual bishops. The letters—one from clergy and one from laity—can be found at www.faithfulumc.org. Please go to this website, read the letters, and consider signing the one that pertains to you. Thank you for your action.

- Last fall, Mr. Jim Winkler, the General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, addressed the board's directors at Lake Junaluska, NC. Among many other things in his speech, he had this to say: "One of our petitions to the 2012 General Conference affirms the importance of having access to safe and legal abortion services."

Consider, with your editor, what is going on here. One of the privileges of my life is to give a tithe to support the mission and ministry of St. Peter's United Methodist Church and the larger United Methodist Church. So part of my gifts to my congregation and denomination support Mr. Winkler and the General Board of Church and Society in submitting legislation to General Conference 2012 that "affirms the importance of having access to safe and legal abortion services." Yet for over thirty years, I have written and spoken, in the church and in public, to the effect that "access to safe and legal abortion services" results in the deaths of millions of unborn children, and great harm done to their mothers, in American society and beyond. (And while we are at it, I again protest against the "legal," but filthy and unsafe, abortion clinics—like the one in Philadelphia—that have been recently exposed by the media.) Again, through my tithe, I am helping to support Mr. Winkler and his board, as they support "access to safe and legal abortion services," something that I oppose on the basis of natural law, Biblical witness, and Church Tradition. That is problematic.

- Dr. Paul Ramsey, the world-class Christian ethicist who died in 1988, was one of United Methodism's greatest teachers. If memory serves correctly (and that is a fairly big if), years ago Dr. Ramsey wrote that he once had a personal, vocational decision to make: engage in theological argument with the fundamentalists in the South, or take on the theological liberals in the North. As it turned out, he journeyed north to Princeton University's Department of Religion where he consistently challenged theological liberalism for nearly four (4) decades.

Ah, for a theological assignment so simple, so one dimensional. Today so many theological challenges seem to be at hand. (Should this, too, be blamed on the Internet?)

Please remember to pray and fast for the ministry of Lifewatch on the first Tuesday of every month.

In our day, within The United Methodist Church, fundamentalism is found in pockets located here and there. And theological liberalism, which is so very accommodating to contemporary American culture, is not in short supply. Add the organizational Methodism, that is notably short on theology and that is being advanced by Call to Action and the Council of Bishops. At the more local level, the temptation is great to turn the congregation and the Gospel into a spirituality business with religious goods and services offered, all guided by the willingness to change and the will to survive. Everywhere one turns there are theological challenges to be engaged. Forgive me, if this sounds like whining. Perhaps it is.

But thanks be to God, Jesus Christ is still the Lord of the Church. In the power of His Spirit, His Word and His Sacraments gather and sustain the Church. Oftentimes, however, these compelling and comforting truths can be hidden by all the activity and confusion and information overload of our time.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, laity and clergy, stay the course. Trust and obey, one day at a time. Remain faithful to Jesus Christ and His Gospel of Life. This is challenging, to be sure. But this is possible, by the grace our Lord provides superabundantly.

- These days it seems that The United Methodist Church is full of too frequently used slogans and phrases. One of the current phrases in our denominational life, thanks to the report of the Call to Action's "Independent Operational Assessment," is the "crisis of relevancy." "Crisis of relevancy." The phrase brings a few questions to mind. Who gets to decide what "relevancy" is and what it means? And what are the criteria used for describing and determining "relevancy?" Finally, is that not a phrase that also appears regularly in business and organizational literature?

When a denomination, or a denomination's hired research shop, uses the phrase "crisis of relevancy," it seems to be hankering for the good old days when that denomination assumed a position of respectable, cultural leadership in the general society. There was a day when Methodism, for better or for worse, was morally out front of American culture and attempted to lead the way forward. However, that is no longer the case. (For a whole host of reasons.) Hence, talk of a "crisis of relevancy" sounds like a yearning for the golden age of Methodism in American society.

There is another way, perhaps a more theological way, to look at these matters. Whenever the Word of God is faithfully preached or taught, and whenever the Sacraments commanded by Jesus Christ are rightfully observed, there is no "crisis of relevancy." After all, through the Word and the Sacraments, Jesus Christ Himself comes to His Church and goes to work powerfully. That is the most relevant event in all the world, for all people!

The icon of the Good Shepherd surely raises questions about some disgraceful problems (crises?) in United Methodist life today—such as the general turning away from Word-and-Sacrament ministry; the extravagant

salaries and benefits paid to bishops, district superintendents, and some pastors; the unwillingness of leaders to preach and teach the faith of the Church (including Christian morals related to homosexuality and abortion); denominational leaders who seek renewal of the church through organizational means; and on and on. These problems, taken together, contribute to our denomination's experience of a "crisis of relevancy." These problems, taken together, prompt United Methodists to question their own church and those outside the Church to become cynical toward all churches.

Conclusion? The way out of the "crisis of relevancy" is the renewal of Word-and-Sacrament ministry in The United Methodist Church today.

- What happens to a church, a denomination or a congregation, when it decides it will not, for whatever reason, attempt to teach church doctrine (including morals)?

This is not just a theoretical question. It is a question that United Methodists, clergy and laity, might well be pondering. After all, the Call to Action recommendations seem to be encouraging The United Methodist Church and its congregations to turn away from the teaching of basic doctrine. The hope is that, by avoiding controversial doctrinal matters, the church can get busy building vital congregations for making faithful disciples of our Lord. Question: Can vital congregations be built, or faithful disciples be made, apart from the truth of church doctrine? This pastor thinks not.

Back to the initial question: What happens to the church which attempts to order its life without doctrine? In the early 1900s, Dr. Erik Peterson (1890-

1960, then a young professor of New Testament and early Church history), in correspondence with Dr. Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930, then a senior Church historian and theologian of the liberal school), noted three directions for a church without doctrine. (See Michael J. Hollerich's wonderful article "Retrieving a Neglected Critique of Church, Theology and Secularization in Weimar Germany," *Pro Ecclesia* [Summer 1993], pp. 305-332.) First, a church without doctrine could order its life according to the cultural elite's reason, which is available from the culture surrounding the church. So, such a church might accommodate itself to the cultural reasoning of the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. Second, a church without doctrine could order its life by providing each of its members and friends with various religious experiences. Third, a church without doctrine could order its life by getting huffing-and-puffing busy in a variety of activities—from political action to outreach ministry to evangelism. (To be sure, a church without doctrine should engage the larger culture, make room for the religious experiences of the individual, and be busy about the good works that God gives. But it is something else again for a church to order its life around these endeavors.)

Peterson's suggestions, in our day, seem just about spot on, as the British say. When United Methodism sets aside doctrine, the church elevates culturally accommodated reason, individual religious experience, and/or busyness to a place they were not meant to occupy. Best to teach doctrine first, even when such teaching is difficult and challenging. That helps to keep the church in the way of faithfulness.

ORDER FORM: I wish to order: ___ copies of **THE RIGHT CHOICE: Pro-Life Sermons** (\$12.00/copy); ___ copies of **THE CHURCH AND ABORTION: In Search of New Ground for Response** (\$5.00/copy); ___ copies of **THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT ABORTION** (\$7.00/copy); ___ copies of **HOLY ABORTION?: A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice** (\$8.00/copy); ___ copies of **THE JERICHO PLAN: Breaking Down the Walls Which Prevent Post-Abortion Healing** (\$8.00/copy); ___ copies of **A LOVE FOR LIFE: Christianity's Consistent Protection of the Unborn** (\$10.00/copy); ___ copies of **30 DAYS FOR LIFE: A Prayer Devotional** (\$2.00/copy); and ___ copies of **THEOLOGY OF THE BODY SEMINAR** (Dr. Paul J. Griffiths)(\$10.00/DVD set). Prices include shipping.

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12/01/11

- * Murder in Kansas, abortion in America
- * Correspondence with several bishops
- * Considering 2012 General Conference

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● Alveda King is the niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She is now the director of the African American Outreach for Priests for Life and Gospel of Life Ministries.

“One of her projects is to reclaim her uncle’s legacy for the pro-life movement by showing that his statements, religious beliefs, and advocacy for the oppressed indicate that Martin Luther King was against abortion. Although Planned Parenthood gave him an award in the 1960s, Ms. King insists that he would not support legalized abortion today, since he would see the harmful effects of the 1973 Roe v.

Wade decision.

““Planned Parenthood, stop implying that my uncle, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would support abortion if he was alive today,” Ms. King writes. ‘Uncle Martin, were he alive today, would be on the side of the young, the weak, the infirm, and the poor in spirit. The award you claim that he accepted was not accepted by him but by his wife, Coretta, and the speech she read was not written by my uncle. We know that you only gave him the award in an attempt to reach the black community through their religious leaders as is verified by the words of your founder, Margaret Sanger.’” (Brian Caulfield, “The Growing African American Pro-Life Movement,” Human Life Review [Winter/Spring 2011], p. 28)

● *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* “Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail.”♥

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