

THE CHURCH STRUGGLE CONTINUES — UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS IN GLORY

The Church is like a great ship sailing the sea of the world and tossed by the waves of temptation in this life. But it is not to be abandoned—it must be brought under control.

As an example of this we have the Fathers of the past, Clement and Cornelius and many others in the city of Rome, Cyprian in Carthage and Athanasius in Alexandria. Living under pagan emperors, they steered the ship of Christ, that is the Church, his beloved spouse. And they did this by teaching, defending, working and suffering even to the shedding of their blood.

When I considered the example of these man and of men like them, I was filled with fear. Dread came upon me and trembling, and the darkness of my sins almost overwhelmed me. I should have been only too glad to give up the government of the Church which I had accepted, if only I could have found some support for this course of action in the example of the Fathers or in sacred scripture.

Therefore, since this is the situation and since the truth may become wearied but cannot be overcome or deceived, I take refuge in my weariness in the one who spoke through Solomon: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” And elsewhere: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.” Let us stand firm in doing what is right and prepare to face temptations, so that we may hope for support from the Lord and be able to say to him, “Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to the next.”

Let us trust in the one who laid this burden upon us. What we cannot bear on our own, let us bear with the help of the one who is all-powerful and who said: “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Let us stand firm in battle on the day of the Lord, because days of distress and anguish have come upon us. Let us die, if God wills, for the sacred laws of our fathers, so that we may be worthy to share an eternal inheritance with them.

Let us not be dumb watch-dogs or silent spectators: let us not be hirelings that flee at the approach of the wolf. Let us be watchful shepherds, guarding the flock of Christ, preaching to great and small alike, to rich and poor, preaching all that God has decreed to men of all degrees and ages, insofar as God gives us the power. (emphases added)

—Boniface (672-754), an Anglo-Saxon missionary who helped reform the Frankish church and who brought it closer to Rome), Letter 78 from *For All the Saints: A Prayer Book for and by the Church*, Volume I (American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, Delhi, NY, 1994 [first printing]), pp. 311-312.

LET US NOW SING THE PRAISES OF LEICESTER R. LONGDEN

The Reverend Dr. Leicester R. Longden is a man heavy with church “cred.” Origins in the Salvation Army. M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary—in New York City, not Richmond. Ph.D. from Drew University under the direction of Dr. Thomas C. Oden. Elder in The United Methodist Church. Member (retired) of the West Michigan Conference. An expert on Dr. Albert C. Outler. Writer of countless articles. Author of books. Pastor. Seminary professor. Theologian. Member

of the Lifewatch Advisory Board.

And friend. So, to me, his name is “Les.”

My earliest recollection of Les was our attendance at a conference on the theology of Karl Barth. It took place in New York state during the 1980s. Early in the conference, Les and a mutual friend from Drew ganged up on this unsuspecting pastor and accused him of being a “crypto-Catholic.” To this day, I am thankful that both of them were nonviolent....

Memories from the early 1990s recall Les playing a considerable role in The Confessing Movement within

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The United Methodist Church. Theologically and morally formed by the writings of Barth and Bonhoeffer, he knows what it means for the Church to confess—truly confess!—its faith over against false faiths that are always on offer and so tempting. Les leads many of us United Methodists to understand the importance of the Church’s clear confession of true faith—and its denunciation of counterfeit versions.

To this day, Les remains a gifted and precise writer—often for the edification of the whole church. Also, a relentless teacher. An engaging and thoughtful preacher. (His 2004 Lifewatch Sermon is exemplary.) But best of all, he is a marvelous theological conversationalist. His reports, stories, insights, comments, and humorous asides always invite those blessed with his conversation to become better people, to mature in Christ and His Church, and to fulfill with joy their God-given callings.

Thanks be to God for Les Longden—his life, his faith, his witness! And thanks be to God that Les is still at it! (PTS) ♥

FAITHFULNESS TO CHRIST IS CATHOLICITY IN THE CHURCH

Now that it has been decided that the next General Conference will be postponed until 2024, the continuing destabilization and decline and now separation of The United Methodist Church are accelerating. Also, the launch of the Global Methodist Church is underway. **So the crucial question arises, among Methodists at this difficult time, what does faithfulness to Jesus Christ look like? This pastor believes that faithfulness to Christ, now as always, looks like catholicity.**

Let’s reflect for a moment.

For the Lifewatch community, the defining essay on catholicity was written by Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker. Bp. Whitaker’s essay, “Will There Be a Place for Catholic Substance in the Next Methodism?,” appeared as a Special Report in the June 1, 2020 issue of this newsletter. (It remains available at the Lifewatch website.) There the good bishop wrote with wisdom, in detail, and at length about “catholic substance” or catholicity.

In this more humble article, we will understand catholicity as did St. Vincent of Lerins (a monk and theologian, who died in 435) when he wrote that “all possible care must be taken, that we [that is, the Church] hold **that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.**” (emphasis added) So, those of us dedicated to the catholicity of Methodist churches declare with St. Vincent that “all possible care must be taken, that we [Methodists] hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” By doing so, we Methodists

firmly announce that we are not making up our faith as we go along; rather, we receive the one faith, “that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” To a great extent, Wesleyan practice and Methodist tradition provide the catholic riches that can fortify the Methodist church for faithfulness today and tomorrow.

Here are several necessary ways for Methodists, laity and clergy, to enhance the catholicity of their congregations.

Both Churches Should Be Dedicated to Catholicity

Both The United Methodist Church (UMC) and the Global Methodist Church (GMC) should be dedicated to catholicity. United Methodists must recognize their habit of accommodating and pandering to elite American culture. And Global Methodists must recognize their tendency to make decisions on the basis of what is easy, convenient, and/or popular. Catholicity can save both the UMC and the GMC from their own worst sides.

Catholicity in both churches would include intentionally emphasizing the Word of God, Biblical interpretation through doctrine and tradition, serious catechesis, moral instruction, liturgy, the sacraments, and theological education in The Great Tradition of the Church. If the UMC and the GMC do the hard work of catholicity, they will become thicker, sturdier, more faithful churches.

On the other hand, if they do not bother with catholicity, or if they work with a dumbed-down version of catholicity (such as “inclusivity”), these churches will quickly enter the dustbin of history and will be known only by denominational historians. Neglecting catholicity can and will leave these churches vulnerable to the individualizing, dissolving acids that destroy contemporary institutions in our time.

The Church’s Faith

Catholicity starts with the Church’s faith—that is, the consensual, ecumenical faith of the Church through the ages, which is acknowledged and reflected by Wesleyan witness and Methodist doctrine. To be catholic, The United Methodist Church and the Global Methodist Church must fully and tightly embrace the Church’s historic faith. A denomination is catholic when it knows what it believes and can articulate it in a way that engages the churnings in this world. A catholic denomination makes clear to its members that the church has strong doctrine—and that includes church teaching on human life and human sexuality.

The Theological Summit on the Nicene Creed, which was held last January in Alexandria, VA, is a very promising initiative that is sure to lift up, deepen, and spread the Church’s one faith throughout The United Methodist Church and the Global Methodist Church. A catholic denomination knows that it should receive the Church’s faith, and that it should hand it on. A catholic church’s faith is not just another exercise in expressive individualism.

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

Bishops with Catholicity

Bishops with catholicity must lead their pastors and congregations toward health and strength. Through their servant ministries, these bishops allow Jesus Christ to build His Church (Matthew 16:18)—so bishops, through their own creativity and ingenuity, do not have to.

Bishop Mike Lowry recently resigned from The United Methodist Church to join the Global Methodist Church. In his April 28, 2022 letter of resignation, he wrote to Bp. Cynthia Harvey and Bp. Bob Farr: “The presenting issue, characterized by a dispute over our understanding of human sexuality, more specifically whether or not clergy should be allowed to perform same-gender marriages and whether it is permissible to ordain ‘self-avowed practicing homosexuals,’ masks the deeper and truly significant disagreement over what constitutes fidelity to the historic confession of the Christian faith expressed in the normative nature of Holy Scripture as the primary rule of faith, the ecumenical creeds, the Articles of Religion, and Wesley’s Standard Sermons. Put succinctly, the massive iceberg beneath the roiling waters of our looming separation is the ongoing argument over just what constitutes the theological and moral foundations of contemporary Methodism.” (Emphasis added. To read all of this inspiring letter, go to “Crossing the Rubicon: A Bishop Says Goodbye to The United Methodist Church” on the Firebrand Magazine website.) That, my friends, is the letter of a bishop with catholicity.

On the other hand, bishops without catholicity will follow their own lights, and rely on their own creativity, to lead their episcopal areas. Always seeking the path of least resistance, making as many Methodists as possible happy, and paying little to no attention to the will of Christ (the Lord of the Church!), they will generally make a mess of things—as they have for decades. Certainly, they will open and close their meetings with prayer; but the substance of their meetings will make no reference to Jesus Christ, and His Lordship over and His will for His Church. Unfortunately, these bishops have everything under their own control.

Leaders Repent

In churches with catholicity, leaders (especially bishops) surround themselves with friends **and with people who will challenge them and hold them accountable.** Reminded that they are not God’s gift to the Church, such leaders have the humility to repent in public for their sins, their omissions and commissions, their overreach and sloth. These leaders actually believe in, and rely upon, God’s forgiveness of sins.

In churches without catholicity, leaders (especially bishops) routinely circle their wagons, and dig in their

“When clergy and laity are confident in the Church’s catholic faith and catholicity, they willingly stand up to bishops and other elites to offer them words of wisdom, guidance, even correction.”

heels, when the going gets tough. Without historic standards of ministry, they lack self-awareness, they refuse self-examination, and they try to live without divine forgiveness.

Freedom

Catholicity in the churches involves proposing and

discussing faithful ways forward—not imposing the one and only way to go. Catholicity in the churches trusts in God’s providence to work through the churches’ decision-making processes. Catholicity in the churches requires respect for: all clergy and laity in the churches, Christian conferencing, deliberation, and decision-making ways and means. With the aid of catholicity, and with the assistance of clergy who believe in free and fair processes, congregations will make up their own minds about which denomination to be a part of—The United Methodist Church or the Global Methodist Church. Catholicity prioritizes people and their freedom over power and property and assets. A catholic church does not coerce, grasp, or punish.

Lacking catholicity, congregations and Annual Conferences descend into power struggles. Left to their own devices, their leaders (clergy and laity) work every situation to their own advantages—striving for more money, more property, more power, more prestige. They are more than willing to punish financially the congregations headed to the Global Methodist Church. Such politicized behavior throws off the Headship of Jesus Christ over His Church.

Courage

When clergy and laity are confident in the Church’s catholic faith and catholicity, they willingly stand up to bishops and other elites to offer them words of wisdom, guidance, even correction. That is, they are able to get over their sheepishness around the bishops and enabled to speak truth to power, to them.

Without reference to Christ and His Church, without catholicity, the laity and clergy of both churches tend to be painfully shy around their bishops. Such deference and obedience to bishops begins to look like groveling.

So, What to Do Right Now?

As catholicity in The United Methodist Church diminished over the years, the church became very thin and fragile. It became vulnerable to the schism that is now underway. Do everything you can to increase both churches—The United Methodist Church and the Global Methodist Church—in catholicity.

By the actual grace of God, fortifying The United Methodist Church and the Global Methodist Church in catholicity can strengthen these churches in their faithfulness to Jesus Christ. (PTS) ♥

WHY GENERAL CONFERENCE POSTPONEMENT WAS THE WRONG DECISION

General Conference Is Necessary

General Conference is essential to United Methodist life. For that reason, the absence of General Conference is destructive to United Methodist life.

General Conference is composed of nearly 1,000 elected delegates from across the church and around the world. These delegates gather in one place to propose legislation, to deliberate, and to vote on matters considered significant by the church. In American society, this kind of a process is called “democracy.” In The United Methodist Church, it requires “Christian conferencing.”

In “The Politics of Postponement and the 2020 General Conference” (March 8, 2022, Firebrand Magazine, firebrandmag.com), Dr. David F. Watson of United Theological Seminary notes the importance of General Conference to the church: “The UMC [United Methodist Church] was built to hold disagreement. At our [founding,] we established certain processes by which we could resolve disagreements and move forward with the business of the church.” At General Conference, those “certain processes” are on full display. Without General Conference, those “certain processes” cannot help The United Methodist Church to “resolve disagreements and move forward.”

Legalities and Logistics

To do its essential work for The United Methodist Church, General Conference is held every four years. The church’s Constitution, at **Paragraph 14. Article II. (The Book of Discipline)**, mandates: “The General Conference shall meet once in four years at such time and in such place as shall be determined by the General Conference or by its duly authorized committees.” Furthermore, General Conference established the Commission on General Conference (COGC). **Paragraph 511. Commission on the General Conference (The Book of Discipline)** legally describes the COGC, so the COGC can then set the times and places, the logistics, for General Conferences going forward.

Recently, the Commission on General Conference voted 14-9 to postpone the next General Conference until 2024. According to the commission and press reports, this postponement was based on the perceived possibility that delegates—particularly those from outside the United States—would be unable to attend General Conference because of vaccination and/or visa issues.

Reasons for Wrongness

By postponing the next General Conference, again, for a couple more years, the Commission on General Conference made the wrong decision. Here are four reasons for the wrongness.

First, the Commission on General Conference was

There are four reasons why postponing the next General Conference until 2024 was the wrong decision.

established to make sure that General Conference actually occurs as prescribed by The Book of Discipline. Under COGC’s “responsibilities” in the Discipline, the word shall is repeatedly used: “The commission shall select the site and set the dates of the General Conference....” (4a); “[t]he commission shall plan the schedule for the opening day of the Conference....” (4b); “[t]he commission...shall make all necessary arrangements for the publication of the Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*....” (4c); “[t]he commission shall take necessary measures to assure full participation of all General Conference delegates....” (4d); “[t]he commission shall recommend to the General Conference the per diem allowance....” (4e); and “[t]he commission shall set the number of legislative committees.... (4f) (emphases added). In Paragraph 511, in mandate after mandate, The Book of Discipline assumes that General Conference will take place and that the Commission will do everything in its power to serve the next General Conference, as the prior General Conference has decided.

Deciding to postpone the next General Conference until 2024, based on “full participation” concerns, the Commission seems to have wandered from its disciplinary responsibilities. Then it decided wrongly.

Second, because of COGC’s postponement vote, The United Methodist Church will not be able to address (let alone resolve), as a body, its current division (over human sexuality, doctrine, and just about everything else) for another two years. The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation, which was negotiated in good faith to allow traditional pastors and congregations to leave the denomination without punishing penalties, will not be considered and passed for years. Therefore, pastors, congregations, and perhaps even Annual Conferences will continue to leave The United Methodist Church in increasing numbers. Flagrant violations of The Book of Discipline—involving same-sex services and the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy—will not be addressed. The United Methodist Church will most probably, in a word, implode. The commission’s decision did not take seriously these probabilities.

Third, the Commission’s postponement decision denies The United Methodist Church its democratic identity, which is exercised under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Democracy happens. It is practiced. It is done. It requires a community in conversation. United Methodists do democracy, in a grand way, at General Conference. Participating in or observing General Conference, United Methodists rely on the movement of the Holy Spirit in their deliberations and seek to discern the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ. No General Conference, no Holy Spirit

at work in the denominational body. No General Conference, no deliberation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. No General Conference, no good. The Commission decided in error.

Fourth, General Conference postponement increased distrust of the people for the leaders, and of the leaders for the people, throughout The United Methodist Church. Not a few United Methodists believe that the bishops were somehow behind the Commission's decision to postpone. This pastor does not know. But it does seem eye-brow raising that the Council of Bishops (COB) press release on the decision to postpone awkwardly declares: "The bishops do not serve as voting members of the Commission." (March 3, 2022) That same day, Bishop Ken Carter's "pastoral response" to the postponement decision uses the same COB language: "I note here that bishops do not serve as voting members of the commission." The Council of Bishops and Bp. Carter seem quite eager to distance bishops from the Commission and its postponement decision; unfortunately, their statements give rise to a suspicion that actually some bishops, behind a curtain, were lobbying or pressuring the Commission to postpone General Conference.

Conclusion

The United Methodist Church needs the next General Conference to occur—sooner, not later. The Commission on General Conference decided otherwise. The Commission voted to postpone. The Commission, well intentioned as its members might have been, went in the wrong direction. So what is to be done?

Commission, how about reconsidering your decision to postpone?

Council of Bishops, how about calling for another special General Conference—this one to begin as soon as possible?

Commission and Council, how about doing something that would encourage The United Methodist Church to be itself—in democratic deliberation, in the power of the Holy Spirit, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ—in a General Conference way before 2024. (PTS)

A version of this article first appeared, on March 21, under UMVoices on the Juicy Ecumenism website of The Institute on Religion and Democracy. ♥

TEACHING IN THE CHURCH: FALSEHOOD LEADS TO TRUTH

In the late 1980s, The Durham Declaration: To United Methodists on Our Church and Abortion was forming. The first meeting took place, not surprisingly, in Durham, NC—at Duke Divinity School. Dr. Thomas A. Langford—the former Dean of, and the William Kellon Quick Professor of Theology and Methodist Studies at, The Divinity School—participated in the discussion. As memory recalls, while others at the table were bemoaning

how The United Methodist Church had insufficient teaching on life and abortion, Dr. Langford made an off-the-cuff comment. He claimed that, in the Church, false teaching (or heresy) often compels clergy and laity in the Church to sharpen their thinking and to propose true teaching in response. In other words, according to Dr. Langford, false teaching presents the Church with a golden opportunity to teach Christian truth.

Supporting Dr. Langford's point, the rise of the "German Christians," who blended National Socialism and Christianity, compelled Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and the Confessing Church to confess the Church's historic faith, and push back against the heresy at hand, through The Barmen Declaration (1934).

Supporting Dr. Langford's point, The United Methodist Church's muddled teaching on life and abortion compelled United Methodist clergy and laity to write and propose The Durham Declaration to the church.

Also supporting Dr. Langford's point, The United Methodist Church's ambiguous confession of the Gospel compelled Bishop William R. Cannon, Dr. Maxie D. Dunnam, and Dr. Thomas C. Oden to assemble a group of United Methodist clergy and laity that would, in 1995, issue a "Confessional Statement" that clearly confesses "Jesus Christ: The Son, The Savior, The Lord" to United Methodists.

Since there is so much stuff—that is, bad stuff—going on in the larger Church these days, we should expect to see some powerful and truthful responses. What follows are three faithful responses to false teachings that are now being fed to the unsuspecting.

Catholic Bishops in Germany

Under their banner of the "Synodal Way (or Path)," some German bishops in the Catholic Church are acting like advocates for today's Liberal or Progressive Protestantism. Their agenda is predictable: relax Church teaching on marriage and sexuality, relitigate the ordination of women, and so on. Needless to say, these Catholics bishops have prompted many Catholics to stand up and confess the Church's faith in a clear, articulate way.

For example, there is "#SevenQuestions - A Campaign of the New Beginning Initiative." It released a document entitled "This is not the gospel." The document begins: "That Pope Leo X once dismissed the theses of Martin Luther as an irrelevant 'monk's bickering' was perhaps the most momentous mistake in church history. Exactly 500 years later, the Roman Catholic Church is once again about to play down a theological debate in a not-too-distant country, ignore it, and consider it a German problem.

"The next schism in Christendom is just around the corner. And it will come again from Germany. This time it will infect all local churches with the spirit of rebellion and betrayal of the Gospel, if the universal Church does not reaffirm the foundations of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith, and present them anew to the faithful in

Germany. The ‘Seven Questions to the Catholic Church in Germany on Freedom and Autonomy’ are the warning and wake-up call of theologians, philosophers, and anthropologists from Germany to the universal Church.”

Under the subheading “They will be done?,” the document continues: “Behind the Synodal Way is a fundamental shift in the theological central axis; it explains the multitude of radical demands of this body, which are already causing scandal worldwide. Step by step, the axis around which everything revolves shifted from God and his revelation to man and his needs, away from theocentrism [God-centeredness] to naked anthropocentrism [man-centeredness]. The focus is no longer on the Lord—his word and will—but on man—his will, his interests, his identity, his desires, his freedom is to determine what is the matter in the church, what still seems plausible before the tribunal of modernity (in the shape of an unauthorized universal church assembly of more or less knowledgeable delegates), what may be taught and lived and what not.

“‘First of all, no God may be accepted,’ says Magnus Striet, the most influential thought leader of the Synodal Way, ‘who does not respect man’s freedom and thus the right to free self-determination that he claims.’ With Striet, ‘autonomy’ becomes the all-determining criterion.” That “means: There must literally be nothing that determines human beings in their self-realization from the outside, not even God and his commandments.

“That is not the gospel. This is bad German subject philosophy that seeks an unlimited ‘you may’ and demands absolution up front for every act of free and considered self-determination....

“What Christian anthropology is, as defined by Holy Scripture, and what has been worked out in 2000 years of high reflection on divine revelation, can be dismissed, if it disturbs one’s way of life in the age of individual self-determination and if it interrupts the routines of the normal human. Where there is no truth given to man, the God imagined, hoped for, and trimmed in authority may only applaud our freedom and ‘rejoice in a culture that values the success of relationships regardless of sexual preference.’” (emphases added)

Yes, this writing is dense. After all, it is from Germans! Still, the witness to Christ and His Church is clear and powerful.

Another Statement against the German Chaos

“A Fraternal Open Letter to Our Brother Bishops in Germany” was released on April 11, 2022. Early on, it notes that “the urgency of our joint remarks is rooted in Romans 12, and especially Paul’s caution: Do not be conformed to this world. And their seriousness flows from the confusion that the Synodal Path has already caused

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and continues to cause, and the potential for schism in the life of the Church that will inevitably result.

“The need for reform and renewal is as old as the Church herself. At its root, this impulse is admirable and should never be feared. Many of those involved in the Synodal Path process are

doubtless people of outstanding character. Yet Christian history is littered with well-intended efforts that lost their grounding in the Word of God, in a faithful encounter with Jesus Christ, in a true listening to the Holy Spirit, and in the submission of our wills to the will of the Father. These failed efforts ignored the unity, experience, and accumulated wisdom of the Gospel and the Church. Because they failed to heed the words of Jesus, ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ (Jn 15:5), they were fruitless and damaged both the unity and the evangelical vitality of the Church. Germany’s Synodal Path risks leading to precisely such a dead end.”

The Open Letter goes on to name specific problems exhibited by the German bishops’ Synodal Path, such as: “failing to listen to the Holy Spirit and the Gospel,” writing “documents [that] seem largely inspired not by Scripture and Tradition,” composing “content [that] seems to reinterpret, and thus diminish, the meaning of Christian freedom,” lacking “[t]he joy of the Gospel,” appearing to be “the work of experts and committees: bureaucracy-heavy, obsessively critical, and inward-looking,” and focusing “on ‘power’ in the Church [which] suggests a spirit fundamentally at odds with the real nature of Christian life.”

Once again, misdirected teaching leads to words of theological correction that inspire and instruct.

The Case of the Russian Orthodox Church

Putin’s war on Ukraine has revealed to the world the corruption of the Russian Orthodox Church. Just for starters, the leaders of that church refuse to acknowledge that invasion. Their ideology of the “Russian World” causes such historical and moral blindness.

In response, some Orthodox Christians wrote and released “A Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ Teaching.” They declare that “[t]his teaching states there is a transnational Russian sphere or civilization, called Holy Russia..., which includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan), as well as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people throughout the world. It holds that this ‘Russian world’ has a common political center (Moscow), a common spiritual center (Kyiv as the ‘mother of all Rus’), a common language (Russian), a common church (the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate), and a common patriarch (the Patriarch of Moscow), who works in ‘symphony’ with a common president/national leader

“We affirm that Jesus calls his disciples not only to know the truth but to speak the truth. ‘Let your word be Yes, Yes or No, No; anything more than this comes from the vile one.’ (Matthew 5:37).”

(Putin) to govern this Russian world, as well as upholding a common distinctive spirituality, morality, and culture. Against this ‘Russian world’ (so the teaching goes) stands the corrupt West, led by the United States and Western European nations....”

This declaration forces an either/or decision: one sides with “Russian World” thinking, or one sides with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, you cannot blend the “Russian World” ideology with Christianity; you cannot, as a matter of fact, be inclusive on this matter.

Here is the sixth of six theses in the declaration.

“6. ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’ (John 8:31-32)

“We affirm that Jesus calls his disciples not only to know the truth but to speak the truth. ‘Let your word be Yes, Yes or No, No; anything more than this comes from the vile one.’ (Matthew 5:37) A full-scale invasion of a neighboring country by the world’s second largest military power is not just a ‘special military operation,’ ‘events’ or ‘conflict’ or any other euphemism chosen to deny the reality of the situation. It is, rather, *in fact* a full-scale military invasion that has already resulted in numerous civilian and military deaths, the violent disruption of the lives of over forty-four million people, and the displacement and exile of over two million people (as of March 13, 2022). This truth must be told, however painful it may be.

“We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any teaching or action which refuses to speak the truth, or actively suppresses the truth about evils that are perpetrated against the Gospel of Christ in Ukraine. We utterly condemn all talk of ‘fratricidal war,’ ‘repetition of the sin of Cain, who killed his own brother out of envy’ if it does not explicitly acknowledge the murderous intent and culpability of one party over another (Revelation 3:15-16).

“We declare that the truths that we have affirmed and the errors which we have condemned as non-Orthodox and rejected are founded on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Christian faith. We call all who accept this declaration to be mindful of these theological principles in their decisions in church politics. We entreat all whom this declaration concerns to return to ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Ephesians 4:3).” **March 13, 2022—Sunday of Orthodoxy**

Again and again, in the churches, false teaching leads to true teaching—because of the dependable work of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Responding to false teaching and lies, our merciful God prompts and empowers the writing and the witnessing of true teaching. (PTS) ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Just as this is written, a draft of the United State Supreme Court’s majority decision on Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization was leaked. The leaker who broke Supreme Court norms, and perhaps federal and/or District of Columbia laws, has yet to be named. And the reason for this leak has yet to be revealed. What we do know is this: the leak set off a series of protests, by outraged groups and by involved politicians, who are dedicated to persuading the American people to oppose the overturning of Roe v. Wade. These groups and politicians have had their way for nearly 50 years—at the cost of the lives of 60 million unborn children. It appears that the arc of justice is being redirected by an unhurried providence. When the majority decision on Dobbs in final form is handed down, Lifewatch will have much more to say.

- Thank you for your support for Lifewatch’s witness—be it regular, occasional, or one-time. Because of your financial gifts, Lifewatch can keep pointing United Methodists to the Gospel of Life. As usual, your gifts to Lifewatch can be given in three ways. First, write a check to “Lifewatch,” and send it to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/ Cottleville, MO 63338. Second, give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. And third, if you are over the age of 72, give a gift from your IRA as a tax-free distribution. (This means a gift [up to \$100,000...!] can be transferred from your IRA directly to Lifewatch and can count toward your required minimum distribution without being considered as taxable income. If you are considering giving a gift from your IRA, please first consult with Mrs. Evans.) Mrs. Evans and I are deeply grateful for you, for your friendship in Christ, for your prayerful petitions for Lifewatch, and for your financial support of this ministry.

- George Weigel, a reliable Church historian and theologian, writes: “As the names Ambrose, Augustine, Athanasius, and John Chrysostom suggest, the middle centuries of the first millennium, the era of the Church Fathers, were the golden age of the Catholic Episcopate. The Catholic Church recognizes 35 men and women as exemplary teachers; 14 of them—40 percent of the entire roster of the ‘Doctors of the Church’—were bishops who lived in that epoch. Theirs were not tranquil times. But even as these brave shepherds battled heresies within the Church and overbearing rulers who tried to subordinate the Church to their power, they created a spiritual patrimony from which we still benefit today, as the Church regularly ponders their sermons, letters, and biblical commentaries in the Liturgy of the Hours.

“One characteristic of this golden age of bishops was the practice of fraternal challenge and correction within the episcopate. Local bishops in the mid-first millennium believed they belonged to , and shared responsibility for, a worldwide communion. Convinced that what happens in one part of the body has effects on the whole, bishops like Cyprian, Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose, and Augustine did not hesitate to correct brother bishops they thought were mistaken in their doctrine or disciplinary practice—and sometimes did so in forceful language.” (“The World Episcopate and the German Apostasy,” Web Exclusives, First Things website, 03.10.21, emphasis added)

This item is being written on April 30, 2022 (Saturday). Yesterday (April 29) the Council of Bishops (COB) concluded its meeting by Zoom. Tomorrow (May 1) the Global Methodist Church (GMC) launches. United Methodists, we must be frank: the GMC launch would have been unnecessary had United Methodist bishops practiced the mutual correction, among themselves, described above. Without such correction, violations of doctrine and discipline (by bishops!) mounted, the offending bishops were not held accountable, The United Methodist Church became ungovernable, and so the Global Methodist Church became necessary for many.

Watching much of the livestreamed portions of the COB’s April meeting—including all of their talk about “grace,” “love,” “encouragement,” “unity,” “togetherness,” and so on—one is led to surmise that mutual accountability and correction remain low on the bishops’ agenda—if they are there at all. Without mutual discipline among the bishops, the bishops go wobbly and worse. And so does the Church.

● Last November, the Catholic bishops in the United States adopted “The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church” by a vote of 222-8. Though this document does not name names (like Biden or Pelosi), it does make the following claims: “1. Facilitating the grave moral evil of abortion is a public act that fractures one’s communion with Christ and estranges one from the Church. 2. Those who are not in full communion with the Church because of their public actions should not present themselves for Holy Communion. To present oneself for Holy Communion is to state, publicly, that one is in full communion with the Church. If that is not the case, then the lie of presenting oneself for Holy Communion compounds the evil of the public acts that estrange one from the Church. 3. The bishops have a solemn obligation to inform estranged Catholics of their situation and work to catechize them in the truth. If that catechesis fails and the estranged Catholic obstinately continues to facilitate grave evil, then he or she must be told not to present himself or herself for Holy Communion.” (“The Vatican’s Unread Newspaper and the U.S. Bishops,” Web Exclusives, First Things website, 12.15.21) Thank you, George Weigel, for this helpful clarification.

● The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR) is a rich source of “pro-humanity” information—that is, information that does not rank people according to skin color, sex, and so on. FAIR directed this pastor to the video of a lecture entitled *Health Professionals in the Nazi Era: Learn from the Past, Understand the Present, Protect the Future*. Dr. Matthew Wynia—Director of the Center for Bioethics and Humanities at the Anschutz Medical Campus at the University of Colorado—presented the lecture. Not surprisingly, he began by noting the “obligation of remembrance.” That is, we are obligated to remember that the work camps and the death camps of the Nazis were framed as “public health” or scientific matters. Before the advent of National Socialism, German medicine was considered the most advanced in the world. But with the rise of the Nazis, the German medical establishment began its eugenic explorations—which were informed by the eugenics being practiced in the United States. (For example, the International Conference on Race Betterment was held in Battle Creek, Michigan had taken place in 1914. Eliminating the feeble, sterilizing the undesirable, and criminalizing racially mixed marriage were on the American agenda.) At one point Adolf Hitler declared: “You, you National Socialist doctors, I cannot do without you for a single day, not a single hour. If not for you, if you fail me, all is lost....” By 1938, the German state had taken over Germany’s health sector. Soon “medicalized killing” was introduced. Like wildfire, it spread from euthanizing one disabled child to sustaining death camps that killed millions of Jews and others. At the end of his lecture, Dr. Wynia mentioned how eugenics fell out of favor in the United States; he noted: a messy public argument over decades prevented American elites from expanding their eugenics agenda. This 90-minute video on Youtube will instruct you. Promise.

● Speaking of Nazi Germany, we must mention “Fight Antisemitism, Protect Jewish Life: Declaration on the 80th Anniversary of the Wannsee Conference” (January 20, 2022). (As you will remember, Wannsee formally established plans for the Final Solution, the Holocaust. This conference was dramatically reenacted in the movie “Conspiracy,” an HBO film.) The declaration was written, signed, and released by the Evangelische Akademie zu Berlin and the European Coalition for Israel. It reads, in part: “We experience today a rising tide of antisemitism in the form of delegitimation of the Jewish religion as well as the State of Israel. The Holocaust did not start with the Wannsee Conference, but with a long series of laws and edicts, which were passed to isolate, discredit, and delegitimise Jewish culture and religion. These effort culminated in the so-called ‘Final Solution.’ Remembering these atrocities, we call on Christians and Christian churches to be ‘their brother’s keeper,’ to show solidarity with their Jewish neighbours and create conditions in which Jewish life flourishes.” Amen.

● Rose Mary Lyons lived in Metuchen, NJ. At 90, she crossed the Jordan on February 11, 2020. I did not learn of her death until January 26, 2022. Why mention Rose Mary? Because she was a devout follower of Jesus Christ, a faithful Roman Catholic

Christian, and a servant of the Gospel of Life. In 1985, she founded the Life Choices Resource Center in Metuchen. That is when this editor first met her and admired her works of mercy. Her witness was infectious. Many caught it and never got rid of it! May Rose Mary Lyons continue to rest in God's perfect peace.

● On January 7, Dr. Stanley Hauerwas was awarded the 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award by the Society of Christian Ethics. Said this academic society: "Hauerwas has sought to recover the significance of the virtues for understanding the nature of the Christian life. This search has led him to emphasize the importance of the church, as well as narrative for understanding Christian existence. His work cuts across disciplinary lines as he is in conversation with systematic theology, philosophical theology and ethics, political theory, as well as the philosophy of social science and medical ethics." Dr. Hauerwas is the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law at Duke University. For years, God has used Hauerwas to form, and inform, ministers and theologians of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are thankful that he is an advisor of Lifewatch. What a gift Stanley Hauerwas has been, is, and will be to the Church—and society.

● When he was serving as bishop, Dr. William Willimon was asked, "What do you miss most in the university,

"The Christian community is not the result of human effort. God has made us into his people by calling us."

compared with your new life as church bureaucrat?"

Dr. Willimon's response included this money quotation: "Church [as opposed to the university] is notoriously nonselective. Jesus prohibits Methodists having an

admissions committee. You can choose friends, but you can't choose with whom to be church. Jesus forces us to work with anybody Jesus drags in the door.'

"...as Henri Nouwen noted, church is constituted not by 'family tie, or social or economic equality, or shared oppression or complaint, or mutual attraction, but the divine call. The Christian community is not the result of human effort. God has made us into his people by calling us.'"

Willimon also recalled this comment from a ministerial colleague: "My congregation is fragmented and divided, red vs. blue, conservative vs. liberal. Their bickering and contentiousness [are] wearing me down."

Willimon shot back: "Blame it on Jesus." Then, in his article, Willimon added: "In love." (from William H. Willimon's devotional "The Church: Jesus Being Difficult" [March 4, 2021], which is from Willimon's book Accidental Preacher: A Memoir)

● It seems that what you see in American culture is what you get, sooner or later, in The United Methodist Church. And what you see in The United Methodist Church is what you get, sooner or later, in American culture.

Months ago, there was Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, leader of the North Georgia Conference, boldly claiming "to speak for Jesus Christ" (John Lomperis, "Methodist Bully Bishop Escalates North Georgia Crisis, for 'Love,'"

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juicyecumenism.com, July 14, 2021). A few months later, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the Chief Medical Advisor to the President, declared: "I represent science" (Daniel Chaitin, "Fauci hit by Cruz missile in war of words over 'science,'" Washington Examiner, November 28, 2021).

These two statements—one by a bishop and one by a public-health official—demand our attention.

For starters, a bishop does not speak for Jesus Christ—especially when that bishop claims to do so. Only by trusting, obeying, and proposing the Word of God, a bishop acts as a *servant* of Christ among the People of God. When a bishop claims to speak for Christ, that bishop is surrendering her God-given authority and using her ecclesiastical office to overpower others.

Needless to say, a solitary scientist never represents science. After all, science is one great, big, messy argument about what is observably, empirically, and demonstrably true. Standing alone, Dr. Fauci could

not, and does not, represent the argument that is science. Instead, he seems to represent only himself—an experienced, governmental official, who has survived in his office much longer than most. Were he to attempt to truly strive to represent science, he would frequently cite and explain scientific studies, and agree with some and disagree with others and give the reasons why (based on scientific evidence and reasoning).

What can we learn from this bishop, this governmental official, and their overstatements? That people with authority *must* be checked and balanced by the institutions they serve. Again, leaders in the Church and in the State must be checked and balanced. If leaders in the Church and the State are not held accountable, they tend to forget their roles as servants—of Christ and science, the Church and the citizenry.

• *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* "Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail." ♥

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