

## JESUS CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED AND IS RISEN. LIKewise, THE CHURCH.

"I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history."

--Cardinal Francis E. George, 2010

(Tim Drake, "Cardinal George: The Myth and Reality of 'I'll Die in My Bed,'" National Catholic Register, April 17, 2015)

"...the Passion [of Jesus Christ] holds, too, for the Christian church, that worldly story is also now well into the hours of darkness.... I don't know how long these three metaphorical days of mourning will last; but the other message of the Passion is that this, of all times, is the moment for faith.

This story has long been retold not just as history, but also as prophecy.

And seen thus, the Passion's deepest mystery is yet to come. For on the third day, the disciples found the stone rolled away. And from behind it, Word and Flesh returned: once again living...."

(Mary Harrington, "The Death of Christian Privilege," UnHerd.com, April 10, 2023)

## WHAT METHODISTS CAN LEARN FROM SCHISM

Once where there was one church, now there are two churches. It is not a happy sight.

The United Methodist Church continues its slide into schism. United Methodist bishops appear to be uninhibited in their exercise of episcopal power to secure material advantage for their annual conferences. The Global Methodist Church, as a denominational infant, begins to crawl—on good days. Civil-law and church-law skirmishes among Methodists mount.

United Methodists, who were "tired of fighting," said that a separation of The United Methodist Church would result in less "fighting." Well, that was wrong.

Methodists—sons and daughters of Rev. John Wesley, Christians who pride themselves on being methodical, on seeking holiness, on aiming for Christian perfection—seem to be in chaos. United Methodist chaos is from rushing to prevent and repair damages due to departure. Global Methodist chaos is from trying to organize a denomination while it is moving and growing.

Perhaps now is the time to ask: What was neglected, in The United Methodist Church, that led to schism? And from this point forward, how can The United Methodist Church and the Global Methodist Church live most faithfully?

## FOCUS ON THE WORD OF GOD

That is what United Methodists did not do, but should

have. Focus on the Word of God. From this point forward, United and Global Methodists should focus on the Word of God.

The Word of God must be defined. The Church defines the Word of God in three ways or through three dimensions. First, the Word of God is Jesus Christ. As John 1:14 declares, "The Word became flesh and lived among us...." He is the *living Word*. Second, the Word of God is the Bible. As II Timothy 3:16 states, "All scripture is inspired by God...." This is the *written Word*. Third, the Word of God is the sermon. As II Timothy 4:20 implores, "preach the word [of God]...." to the churches. This is the *proclaimed Word*. So, fully defined, the Word of God is living, written, and proclaimed Word—that is, Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the sermon.

Again, the current challenge, for Methodists, is to focus on the Word of God.

This is not a cry for fundamentalism. This is not a plea for pietism. This is not a theological trick to smuggle many agendas into the church. (After all, some reduce the Word of God to the Bible; then they get to interpret the Bible however they prefer; right? Wrong. For faithful interpretation of the Bible, in The United Methodist Church and Global Methodist Church, requires the assistance of church doctrine.) This is not a demand for spirituality without substance.

Focus on the Word of God is a challenge that emerges from The United Methodist Church's Constitution, doctrine, and discipline—from the church's foundation and

structure. Again, The United Methodist Church's (and the Global Methodist Church's provisional) Constitution, doctrine, and discipline instruct the church, its clergy and laity, to focus on the Word of God.

The church's Constitution, in the Preamble, asserts: "The church is a community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. It is the redeemed and redeeming fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by persons divinely called...." (The Book of Discipline [or BOD][2016], p. 25, emphasis added)

The church's doctrine (Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith) repeatedly refers to the Word of God—especially in the doctrines on Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Church, and worship. (BOD, Paragraph 104, pp. 65-77)

The church's discipline ranks "preach the Word of God" as the very first task of three pages of "Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors." (BOD, Paragraph 340, p. 275)

Again and again, The United Methodist Church insists that its congregations, clergy, and laity focus on the Word of God.

### SET-ASIDE CONCERNS

As The United Methodist Church and Global Methodist Church focus on the Word of God, these churches must set aside some of their current concerns and pursuits.

Precise descriptions of denominational life can be interesting. However, concentration on what word best describes the schism now unfolding takes contemporary United and Global Methodists away from hearing, trusting, and obeying the Word of God.

Methodist history is important. But Methodist history—which includes Methodist churches that went into schism and Methodists who disobeyed church doctrine and discipline—distract today's United and Global Methodists from responding to the leading of the Word of God today.

Sociological studies might help Methodists better understand their denominations. But such studies—e.g., the demographics and locations of disaffiliating congregations—can take Methodist hearts and minds away from receiving, trusting, and obeying the Word of God.

Wesleyan theology, accurately understood, can help Methodists rediscover identity and mission. However, Wesley's theology should never replace the Word of God. Rather, Wesley's theology should be a means of assisting contemporary Methodists in discerning, trusting, and obeying God's Word.

### A LAST WARNING

Rev. John Wesley was called and used by God for divine purposes in 18th century England and beyond. Because of God's empowering grace, Wesley became an outstanding evangelist and renewal-ministry executive. Unfortunately, the theological materials he left "the people called Methodists" did not have enough ecclesiology (or theology of the Church). So to this day, Methodists are notoriously weak in our understanding and practice of the Church. In the schism of The United Methodist Church now unfolding, a result of that weakness is on full display.

Therefore, from this point forward, United and Global

Methodists—bishops and district superintendents, seminary professors and agency executives, pastors and laity; at General Conference, Annual Conference, Charge Conference, Administrative Council, and in worship services—would be wise and faithful to focus on the Word of God. What we lack, God can provide—through the Word. (PTS) ♥

## PRESIDENT BIDEN'S FIRST RESPONSE TO *DOBBS*

June 24, 2022. A Friday. On that momentous day, the United States Supreme Court handed down its *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision. On that memorable day, the Supreme Court declared that the United States Constitution does not bestow a right to abortion.

After the announcement of *Dobbs*, President Biden responded with a public statement. Toward the end of his statement, he announced his conclusion: "Let me close with two points.

"First, I call on everyone, no matter how deeply they care about this issue, to keep all protests peaceful. Peaceful. Peaceful. Peaceful. No intimidation. Violence is never acceptable. Threats and intimidation are not speech. We must stand against violence in any form—regardless of your rationale.

"Second, I know so many of us are frustrated and disillusioned that the Court has taken something away that is so fundamental. I know so many woman are going to face incredibly difficult situations. I hear you. I support you. I stand with you. The consequences and the consensus of the American people—[on] core principles of equality, liberty, dignity, and a stability of the rule of law—demand that *Roe* should not have been overturned. With this decision, the conservative majority of the Supreme Court shows how extreme it is, how far removed from the majority of this country, how it made the United States an outlier among developed nations of the world. But this decision must not be the final word. My administration will use all of its appropriate, lawful powers...but Congress must act. But with your vote, you can act. You can have the final word. This is not over.

"Thank you very much. I'll have more to say in weeks to come. Thank you."

In his first point, the President calls for all protests to be peaceful, not violent. Then, in his second point, in rather overheated language, he lists reasons to protest (which may have used turn protests violent). Again, Biden's second point could be taken as moral justification for violent protest against *Dobbs*.

Consider the context.

Beginning in 2022 until the present, the Biden Administration's Department of Justice (DOJ) arrested and prosecuted many non-violent, pro-life activists. As of February 24, 2023, **DOJ had charged 34 peaceful pro-lifers** with FACE [Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances] violations. (The Loop, CatholicVote, February 24, 2023) **In response to 393 violent acts against pregnancy centers,**

**pro-life organizations, and Roman Catholic churches, DOJ had arrested only a few of the suspected vandals.** (CatholicVote website, Violence Tracker: Tracking Attacks on Pregnancy Centers and Pro-Life Organizations and Violence Tracker: Over 300 Attacks on Catholic Churches, April 25, 2023) Apparently, the peaceful are arrested, while the violent are not.

After the President of the United States issued a moral and constitutional call for protests to be peaceful, then he should hold all citizens accountable to the single rule of law (that indeed permits peaceful protests just as certainly as it forbids violent protests). That rule of law should always be applied equally and consistently; it should never be applied unequally—e.g., with great lenience for the pro-choice community and with aggressive rigor for the pro-life community.

Please allow one last comment: “Mr. President, please remember that your stated, vigorous opposition to a Supreme Court decision just might ignite or contribute to violent protestations.” (PTS) ♥

## TESTIMONY TIME

*Dr. Kathi Aultman is a medical doctor. As an OB-GYN, she performed more than 500 abortions. Then she was converted to Christ and His Church, and her mind, her life, and her medical practice were transformed. What follows is her testimony.*

### EARLY YEARS

I was one of those kids who lived to dissect things. I would volunteer to clean my father’s fish, when he caught fish, so that I could see their insides. I would even dissect the eyes so that I could find the lenses. So I was always interested in that kind of thing. If my mother was going to cook heart at night, I wanted to have it first, so I could pour water in it and see how the valves worked. So from a young age, I just knew I wanted to do something in science.

My father was a Methodist preacher. So I grew up in the church. But by the time I got to college, I was an atheist—partially because of different things that I saw go on in the church, and the way some people treated my father. To make a long story short, I ended up getting pregnant—after graduating from college, but prior to going to medical school. I chose to have an abortion, because I was afraid I would not be able to be a doctor. I was afraid of what people would think of me. And I was afraid that if we had to get married, because of the pregnancy, the marriage would end in divorce. So I had the abortion.

When I got to my residency program, I felt strongly that no woman should have to carry a child she did not want. I became a real strong advocate for women’s right to an abortion. All OB-GYNs were required to know how to do at least first-trimester abortion—unless they opted out because of conscience in the United States. Two of the men in my program did that. I didn’t, of course, because I agreed with it.

After your first year, you could get your medical license and then you could, what we call, “moonlight”—where you

get a side job because being a resident hardly pays anything. So instead of getting a job in the emergency room, which a lot of residents did, I got a job in an abortion clinic. So I did abortions to make money.

I did not see any difference between a human fetus and the chick embryos that I used to dissect in college. I did not think of the fetus as human. If my patient wanted the baby, and she miscarried, I would be really sad with her; but if she did not want the baby, I had no qualms about doing the abortion for her. The only time I had any qualms about doing abortion was during my neonatal-intensive-care unit, where I realized that I was aborting babies the same age as babies we were trying to save. But I was able to compartmentalize that and kind of shoved it to the back of my mind and did not really think about it too much. I even went so far as to continue doing abortions while I was pregnant. I saw no contradiction in that. My baby was wanted; theirs were not. So I saw no problem.

### CHANGE BEGINS

When I went back to the clinic, after I had my baby, to do abortions, that’s when there was a problem. Somehow I had made the baby-fetus connection, I think. There were three patients who basically changed my mind. The first one I had done three abortions on already. The second one came in with a friend who asked her if she wanted to see the tissue, and she said, “No. I just want to kill it.” And then the third was a woman who already had four children, and she and her husband did not think they could afford another; and she cried the whole time. After that I could no longer do abortions just because a baby was not wanted. The really sad thing was that I still believed in abortion, and I still referred for abortion.

It was not until later that, at one point, I became a Christian—who still believed in abortion. But I began to surround myself with Christian friends. One day one of them said, “Kathi, I know that you feel strongly about abortion, but would you read this article?” It was an article that compared abortion to the Holocaust. My father was with the unit that liberated the first concentration camp in World War II. So I grew up with all those pictures. I could never understand how the German doctors could do the things they did. As I thought about what I had been doing, I suddenly understood. It was because, just [like] I did not consider the fetus as a human being, they did not consider their victims as human beings. That was the first time I saw myself as a mass murderer. Right at that time Ted Bundy [1946-1989], who was an infamous serial killer in the United States, had been arrested and was in the news. And I thought, “Oh my goodness, I had killed a lot more people than Ted Bundy.”

So I ended up graduating and went into private practice. Thankfully, I did have Christian friends who helped me to get the counseling I needed to heal. I saw patients in my practice, young girls who had unplanned pregnancies, kept them, and did really well. And then I had other patients who were having abortions and were suffering the emotional and physical consequences of abortion. It really did not fit with the whole feminist agenda I had believed. Through that process, I finally, completely switched over and believed that abortion was truly wrong.

*Dr. Aultman told her story to LSN-TV. The complete video of this interview can be found at "Former Abortionist Is Now Pro-Life?," from LSN-TV, at [lifesitenews.com](http://lifesitenews.com) (accessed 03/10/2023). ♥*

## THE HOPE WE HAVE IN THE DARK STATE OF CALIFORNIA

by Dr. Richard Thompson

In spite of the United States Supreme Court's recent reversal of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision, the lives of the unborn remain endangered. Each state, now democratically determining its own laws on abortion, is also deciding the fate of babies yet to be born. Sadly, there are some truly alarming laws and policies emerging.

It was Lord Grey who said in 1914, "The lights of the world are going out one by one, and we shall not see them lit again in our day." It would certainly seem that Lord Grey was prescient about the darkening state of California with its pro-abortion policies.

In California, taxpayer funds are promoting and facilitating abortion on demand. At [www.abortion.ca.gov](http://www.abortion.ca.gov), anyone—including minors—can find where abortions, and financial aid for abortions, are provided. California voters recently passed a measure which enshrines in the state constitution the right to have an abortion. The state's Department of Justice is taking aim at pregnancy centers; and the legislature has passed a raft of pro-choice bills, willingly signed into law by the governor.

It is indeed a dark time in California for those who hold sacred all human life, inside and outside the womb. Yet, Lord Grey notwithstanding, there is also light emerging on the "left coast."

First United Methodist Church of Bakersfield wholeheartedly stands on The United Methodist Church's Social Principle which states: "The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence....[W]e are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child." (Paragraph 161K, *The Book of Discipline* [2016]). On the basis of these convictions, First Church has enthusiastically supported the ministry of the Bakersfield Pregnancy Center. Vacation Bible School children, along with adult small groups, have filled baby bottles with change for the center. A women's group has made prayer shawls and baby quilts for the center. And special Easter offerings have raised over \$10,000 for the pregnancy center.

In February, the Bakersfield Pregnancy Center hosted its annual fundraising banquet with over 600 in attendance. At the dinner, First Church sponsored a table. Director Erin Rogers was pleased with the turn-out and with the \$200,000 raised to support direct ministry to mothers (and fathers) facing crisis pregnancy. She said, "We need churches to be informed, engaged, and active." Thankfully, The United Methodist Church calls its local churches "to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth." (Paragraph 161L, *BOD* [2016]) This

is exactly what First Church does through its involvement with the Bakersfield Pregnancy Center. Last year 359 babies were saved and 87 clients confessed faith in Jesus Christ at the center. It is a place where God saves, and heals, lives.

First Church and the Bakersfield Pregnancy Center are pushing back at the onslaughts of the abortion industry. Rather than curse the darkness emanating from a culture of death, the church and the center are lighting candles in the darkness, sharing hope with expectant mothers and fathers. Here in Bakersfield stands a beacon of hope for the unborn and all who champion the God-given gift that is every human life.

On the cover of this year's banquet program, these words are printed: "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3, NRSV). Even in dark California, the hope of the Lord empowers us to continue to save lives.

*Dr. Thompson is the senior pastor of First United Methodist Church in Bakersfield, CA. ♥*



## AN ICON FOR LIFE

The United States Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision was handed down on June 24, 2022. According to the Anglican calendar, June 24 is the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. So, to commemorate the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and to give thanks to God for this event, the Seabury Society (an Anglican Devotional Society within the Anglican Church in North America) commissioned the creation of an icon of St. John the Baptist leading children to our Lord. (Note above an image of the icon.) The 18"-x-14.5" icon was "written" (or painted) by the Ukrainian iconographer Roman Selivachov,

and it was dedicated to Anglicans for Life last January.

At the dedication service, Mr. Brandon LeTourneau of the Seabury Society said: “St. John the Baptist has long been a symbol for the cause for life. His story in Holy Scripture has been an icon for life for [four] reasons. First, he is promised to his father, Zechariah, even before he is formed in the womb. He is a foretold gift to his parents....”

Second, “[w]hen the Blessed Virgin visits her cousin Elizabeth, St. John leaps for joy in his mother’s womb. Again, he represents the sanctity of life. Not only is he consecrated to a particular ministry in the womb, but he also recognizes the holiness of Christ in his mother’s womb.”

Third, “Christ has sanctified [the womb], right? He did not abhor the Virgin’s womb. And St. John, as his witness, recognizes that and leaps for joy. In the Lutheran tradition, they recognize that moment is when St. John received his prophetic call, through the voice of the Blessed Virgin.”

And fourth, “[e]ven St. John’s death is life-affirming. St. John is beheaded for witnessing to the sanctity of the family, to biblical sexual ethics. It is because he accused the king of his sexual sin and not respecting the family as it had been revealed to Israel that he dies and he gives his life for that cause.”

“...*Roe v. Wade* was overturned on St. John’s Feast Day. So as good apostolic Christians, we are always looking back. We look at history, and we see God’s providential hand moving in history....

“So why an icon? Well, Job tells us that we are to inquire of bygone ages, of what God has done in their day, and the Psalmist says, ‘One generation declares the glory of the Lord to another.’” (Carpe Diem: Anglicans for Life’s Quarterly Newsletter, February 2023)

Anglicans for Life is making available very attractive notecards that feature a picture of the icon. Five notecards and five envelopes for \$5. Place your order at <https://shopafl.org/products/afl-icon-notecards>. (PTS) ♥

## INCLUSION AND CONVERSION

American Catholics are now having the same debates—on human sexuality and the nature of the Church—that American Methodists have been having for years. Earlier this year Cardinal Robert McElroy’s essay in Commonweal set off a storm in Catholic waters. In a remarkable response to the cardinal’s article, Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila of the Archdiocese of Denver, wrote “Radical Inclusion Requires Radical Love.” (Catholic World Report, February 1, 2023, available on the CWR’s website) Archbp. Aquila’s article points both Catholics—and Methodists—to the truth.

First of all, Archbp. Aquila summarizes Cardinal McElroy’s position: McElroy “speaks about a need for ‘radical inclusion’ that invites all the baptized to participate fully in the life of the Church regardless of his or her relationship with the Church and Jesus Christ.”

### GOD’S WORD SPEAKS

Then the archbishop begins to respond to the cardinal’s position: “There is much that could be addressed, but I would

like to focus on putting Jesus Christ first and the joy that flows from adhering to the Gospel. Staying attached to Jesus Christ the ‘vine’ is essential, for the Lord tells us, ‘[A]part from me you can do nothing’ (John 15:5). Similarly, the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, ‘Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him Jesus endured the cross....’ (Hebrews 12:1b-2)

“Cardinal McElroy’s reflection paints the Church as an institution that harms due to its incapacity to welcome everyone into full participation in the life of the Church....[He claims that] the Church categorically discriminates....”

On this allegation of the Church’s inhospitality, the archbishop pushes back:

- “[B]ut did not Jesus himself put demands on his disciples which distinguished them from those who did not respond to the radical and costly call of the Gospel?”
- “Indeed, in the encounter with the rich young man (Mark 10:17-22), Jesus demands radical discipleship from the young man, and he lets him refuse and walk away.”
- “Furthermore, Jesus lays out the cost of discipleship as denying oneself, and even family, for the sake of the Gospel (Luke 9:23-26, Matthew 16:24-25, Luke 14:25-27).”
- “And, just as [Jesus] was not received by everyone, he reminded his disciples as he sent them out if people did not receive the message of the Gospel to simply ‘shake the dust from your feet’ (Matthew 10:14), not wishing them ill but turning them over to the Lord.”
- “Finally, many disciples left Jesus because of his teaching on the Bread of Life (John 6:66), and he goes even so far as to ask the apostles if they want to leave (John 6:67).”
- Conclusion: “Jesus never waters down his teaching, nor does he appeal to conscience; he gives testimony to the truth (John 18:37). The call Jesus gives is radical, and it goes out to everyone, but is not received by everyone because of the cost of discipleship.” (emphasis added)

### BONHOEFFER IN THE BACKGROUND

Archbp. Aquila then offers a testimony about how he learned this hard truth: “As a college student I strayed away from the Church. The Catholic faith did not draw me, as my experience was that of confessors yelling at me or trying to talk me out of my sins. The truths of the faith, even the difficult ones, were not presented with charity.

“It was only when I read the book in the late 1960s by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, titled The Cost of Discipleship, that I started my journey back to Christ and eventually the Catholic Church. I began to understand what the Eucharist is and what I had left behind. I wanted the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and his mercy and forgiveness in Confession, and that brought me back to the living out of my faith. It was a call to leave the values of the world behind and to have my heart and mind formed by Jesus (Romans 12:2). Bonhoeffer’s distinction between ‘cheap grace’ and ‘costly grace’ is timely for us today.” (emphasis added) To repeat: “Bonhoeffer’s distinction between ‘cheap grace’ and ‘costly grace’ is timely for us [Catholics and Methodists!] today.”

## LOVE, INVITATION, AND CONVERSION

The archbishop then returns to the topic of the Church: “Thankfully, the Church I know does radically include the call to every human being in all cultures. Every walk of life--every person in every condition and situation—is invited into the loving embrace of Jesus and the Father, and holy mother Church. Our faith community invites all, no matter what label they’ve chosen, into our community of faith.

“But the Church doesn’t stop there. She invites because she loves; and to love is to will the true good of the other. Only God’s love can move us from all the confusing identities of the world, to see that we are not the ones who decide our identity. Rather the Gospel shows that through the Father’s loving plan, each of us can become a beloved daughter or son of the Father, with our identity firmly rooted in Jesus. Through conversion, a disciple discovers that he or she is not god. God alone determines what is good and evil and, like Christ, the disciple seeks only the will of the Father....

“The call of Christ to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11[ “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”]) is the same call Jesus makes to each of us. We are included in his company, but we are also called to turn from sin. Inclusiveness does not and cannot mean that we remain in our sins. (emphases added) This is because Jesus wants us to be happy.” (A good Wesleyan might add: Jesus wants us to be happy *and holy*.)

Notice above Archbishop Aquila’s focus on Jesus Christ and his faithful use of the Bible. Truly, this archbishop’s focus on the Word is not only for Catholics but also for Methodists. (PTS) ♥

## A PHALANX OF ANGELS THREE MILES OUT

by Lou E. Troester III

*The 2023 Lifewatch Sermon—which was preached by Dr. Matthew Sleeth and which appeared in the March 1, 2023 issue of Lifewatch—inspired the Rev. Troester to recall a pastoral incident, remember its evidence of divine providence, and write the following article.*

It was about 11 p.m. The house was settled for the night, but I had not yet retired. The phone rang—which was not that unusual. A police officer was on the line—which also was not that unusual.

He spoke: “Rev, we need your assistance! We have a man up a tree, intent on suicide. Can you come now?”

“Where are you?” I asked. He gave me the address. “I can be there in twenty minutes.” I hung up, told my wife where I was going, and then called the Prayer Chain leader. I hurriedly requested prayer: “It’s an emergency intervention. I need you to put the chain to praying now. Have them tell the Lord I need a phalanx of angels three miles out. He will know where to send them!” I hung up.

Then I climbed in the old Suburban and drove to the site. It was not unusual for me to be praying at 50 mph. “Lord, please send a phalanx of angels three miles out. Intercept the enemy. You already know where I am going!” The team was

with me in prayer as they lifted up me, the man in the tree, and the crew on site.

Twenty minutes later, I stepped out of the old truck. Gathered around me were police, fire/rescue teams, an ambulance, and a grievously distressed father.

The young man up the tree called out to me, “Preacher (unsure how he knew that, for I had no previous contact with him, no collar, no bumper sticker, no Bible in my hand), you are too late. The devil and his angels are on the way!”

I shot back: “They are not coming! There is a phalanx of angels three miles out! You are not going to die tonight.”

With that, the father of the young man stepped up. “Rev, I want to hug my boy before he dies!”

“Excellent,” I replied. “Can you climb a tree?”

“Yes.”

So I pointed him to the team. They either had heard the conversation or anticipated the need. They were ready to put a harness on him and guide him up the tree. But first, I told him: “When you hug your son, do not let go of him until you are on the ground, and your son is in the hands of the crew.”

Moments later, the young man in the tree was on the ground, then in the ambulance, then on the way to the hospital.

When I speak of this event and the response of God that night, someone will ask, “Was there a phalanx of angels three miles out?”

I reply: “I have no doubt!” It was not necessary for me to see the battle in the night sky. It was out of my control and under God’s.

The devil did not come that night. The young man did not die that night. But I know that God had soldiers enough that I could not count. In the dark of that night sky, the devil’s angels were rebuked. Even so, I never again saw the young man or his father.

I think I have always believed that God answers prayer. No, I did not have to see the angels to believe there was a phalanx of them in the night sky claiming the life of that young man three miles out. The battle was not mine. It was mine to respond to the 11 p.m. request.

*Thank you, Father, for angels seen and unseen, who watch over your children, recognized or not. Thank you. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Rev. Troester is a retired United Methodist pastor who lives in Lehigh, PA. ♥*

## YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• **Lilies That Fester: Abortion and the Scandal of Christian Discipleship** (Resource Publications/An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2022) is a new, significant, and weighty book by Rev. John Bossett Brown, Jr. He is a retired United Church of Christ pastor and a member of the National Pro-life Religious Council (NPRC, to which Lifewatch also belongs). The first part of Brown’s book places abortion in the context of the mass violence throughout the world during the 1900s. The second part reports on Christians’ resistance, and accommodation, to that mass violence; and it exhorts and instructs the Church and

Christians to more faithfully oppose, in the name of Jesus Christ, the worldwide violence that is so prevalent.

Your scribe's comment on the back cover of Rev. Brown's book reads: "Included in the history of modern mass violence has been the destruction of one billion unborn children through abortion. That this violence has often included Christians is horrifying. In Lilies That Fester, John Bossert Brown declares 'No more!' How might mass violence be slowed? Through Christian disciples standing up to the world's murderous powers. And how are they formed? Through the church getting serious about training her clergy and laity in discipleship."

Beware. This book might change your mind and complicate your life. Nevertheless, order a copy, read it (perhaps with Christian friends), and then allow the Spirit to lead you, as a renewed (or new) disciple of Jesus Christ, in avenues of courageous service.

● **In 2021, Planned Parenthood [PP] performed 374,155 abortions.** So every day of 2021, PP took the lives of 1,025 unborn children, and the abortion provider more subtly harmed each of their mothers in the process. (Steven Ertelt, "Planned Parenthood Annual Report Shows It Killed 374,155 Babies in Abortion," April 26, 2023, LifeNews website) Funded by large federal and state grants, and by the revenue stream from selling abortions, PP is a powerful voice for "choice" and abortion in American public life. Perhaps some day a Methodist denomination will stand up to this abortion Goliath.

● **"According to the Pew Research Center, 39% of all women who have abortions are black and 22% are Hispanic, significantly higher percentages than the overall population [of women].** The abortion rate nationwide is four times higher for black women than for white women. In New York City, more black children are aborted than are allowed to be born." (Thomas Jipping and Duggan Foley, "Abortion Is Racist Because It Kills a High Percentage of Black Babies," [www.lifenews.com](http://www.lifenews.com), March 18, 2023) Sad, disturbing facts.

● **Merely mentioning the Church's calling to protect the unborn child and mother from abortion can provoke a vicious, pro-choice attack. Why?**

Jonathan Haidt, social psychologist and Professor of Ethical Leadership at the Stern School of Business at NYU, points to some relevant realities: "...I believe that Greg Lukianoff (author of Coddling of the American Mind, 2018) was exactly right in the diagnosis he shared with me in 2014. Many young people had suddenly—around 2013—embraced three great untruths.

**"Great Untruth #1:** They came to believe that they were fragile and would be harmed by books, speakers, and words, which they learned were forms of violence.

**"Great Untruth #2:** They came to believe that their emotions—especially their anxieties—were reliable guides to reality.

**"Great Untruth #3:** They came to see society as compromised of victims and oppressors—good people and bad people."

"Liberals embraced these beliefs more than conservatives. Young liberal women adopted them more than any other group due to their heavier use of social media and their participation in online communities that developed new disempowering ideas. These cognitive distortions then caused them to become more anxious and depressed than other groups. Just as Greg had feared, many universities and progressive institutions embraced these three untruths and implemented programs that performed reverse CBT [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy] on young people, in violation of their duty to care for them and educate them." ("Why the Mental Health of Liberal Girls Sank First and Fastest," [jonathanhaidt.substack.com](http://jonathanhaidt.substack.com), March 9, 2023)

These same Great Untruths seemed to motivate the loud weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth at the conclusion of The United Methodist Church's General Conference 2019. And now these Great Untruths seem to be playing a role in leading United Methodists into the future.

Will anyone, any bishop, stand up against this emotional intimidation, and put it in its place?

● **Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton**, the president of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, delivered a highly unusual "midterm State of the Church address" on March 2, 2023. Livestreamed and now available on video, the bishop talked to his digital audience while he walked about, and occasionally sat on a pew in a beautiful sanctuary. According to the bishop, the disaffiliation project "has clearly diverted our attention away from the real reason we have this church in the first place—to fulfill the mandate of loving God and loving neighbor through a mission to make disciples in order to literally change the world." Again, the bishop claimed that "...the real reason we have this church in the first place...." *We* have this church? The bishop knows that The United Methodist Church is Christ's Church, not ours. Before anything else, the privilege and the calling of The United Methodist Church is to serve the Word of God, to tell God's story, which can be called The Story of the World. Then and only then can United Methodists possibly know what "love" is, and love God and love

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# Lifewatch

## Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality

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06/01/23

- \* OB-GYN did abortions while pregnant and repented
- \* What Methodists can learn from schism
- \* Angels on suicide watch

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neighbors. If United Methodists do not know and announce God's story, The Story of the World, how in the world do they know what love looks like? Bp. Bickerton and Council of Bishops, please keep The United Methodist Church centered on Jesus Christ and embedded in The Story of the World. Only then will your call for loving God and others be possible.

• **For decades, American Methodism in whatever denominational form has provided a least-common-denominator religion for its communities.** Usually Methodist annual conferences and local churches looked and sounded like the cultures they inhabited. No wonder that Methodist denominations were often known as the most American of churches. "Culture Protestantism" is what Karl Barth called it.

Today **The United Methodist Church** might be playing a different role in American public life. It seems to **be acting like a state church** in the European sense. That is, its witness seems fundamentally shaped by today's federal-governmental policies, positions, and aspirations. For example, consider the matter of abortion: the current administration favors abortion and choice—and so do leading United Methodists (Council of Bishops, General Board of Church and Society, and so on). If that is true, will the Global Methodist Church, in the years to come, be and behave more like a sect than a church? Something to consider.

• **Harrison Butker kicked the field goal that lifted the Kansas City Chiefs** to a 38-35 victory over the Philadelphia Eagles in the 2023 Super Bowl game. More

importantly, Butker witnesses, in public, to Christ, the Church, the Church's faith, and the God-given dignity of every human life.

(Kimberlyn Schwartz, "Kansas City Chiefs Kicker Harrison Butker Condemns Abortion: 'All Human Life Is Valuable,'" February 12, 2023, LifeNews.com) May his number increase.

• **Joseph Epstein, you will remember, once questioned whether Mrs. Jill Biden should be called "Dr. Biden."** The same Joseph Epstein has been writing articles for *Commentary* magazine for 60 years. In the February 2023 issue, in his piece titled "West Rogers Park," Epstein recalls growing up in the Chicago neighborhood: "With only one exception, I never felt the lash of anti-Semitism during my eight formative years, from ten to 18, living in West Rogers Park. In grammar school I was called 'dirty Jew' by a kid living down the block named Billy Lauter. But then, Billy Lauter was a boy of such bad character that, had I been Protestant, he might as likely have called me 'dirty Methodist.'" Any Methodists out there wanting to cancel Joseph Epstein? Don't bother. He could care less.

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

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