

**BISHOP TIMOTHY W. WHITAKER,  
LIFEWATCH THANKS YOU FOR YOUR FAITHFUL SERVICE OF JESUS CHRIST AND  
HIS CHURCH'S APOSTOLIC FAITH.**

## LOOK TO THE WORD

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me' (John 14:6). 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.... I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved' (John 10:1, 9).

"Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

"We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation." —Article I of The Barmen Declaration, 1934

From *Our Confessional Heritage*, Presbyterian Church(USA)(Atlanta, GA, 1978), p. 154

*The Barmen Declaration was drafted by Karl Barth to encourage German congregations, clergy, and laity to resist the popular, aggressive, and totalitarian National-Socialist ideology of that time and place. It seems quite relevant to American Methodists today.*

## THE GIFT OF LIFE

"There is no single life, however lousy, however full of pain and anxiety and seeming unfairness that is not a gift." — Midge Decter, 1986

From Matthew Continetti's "Midge's Gifts," *Commentary* (July/August 2023), p. 16

## THE FUTURE OF THE WEST

"A culture of death under the sign of choice." — R.R. Reno, 2023

From "While We're at It," *First Things* (March 2023), p. 69

## **OVERCOMING APATHY AND OPPOSITION TO PRO-LIFE EFFORTS IN CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS**

*That was the title of a workshop your scribe taught, with Rev. John B. Brown, Jr., at the 2023 National Right to Life Convention at the Hyatt Regency/Pittsburgh International Airport on June 23. (You may recall that Rev. Brown is the author of the recent book Lilies That Fester: Abortion and the Scandal of Christian Discipleship.) The seminar was attended by many, and those who showed up had excellent questions and comments. The following speech was uninspiringly entitled "Ten Things to Remember." Here are the ten. (A version of this article, entitled "Overcoming Apathy and Opposition in the Church" [July 17, 2023], appeared as a Pastoral Reflection on The Human Life Review website.)*

**1. First, last, and always, trust and obey the living Jesus Christ; He is revealed through the Bible and**

**confirmed by Church Tradition. Again, respond to Jesus Christ; do not react to abortion,** pro-choice and pro-abortion ideologies, and Planned Parenthood. "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12, RSV)

**2. Be faithful to Christ's Church.** Every week participate in Word-and- Sacrament worship. At church, join (or start) a small group of pro-life friends; and learn to talk about and live out church doctrine and morals.

**3. Aim to think and live above The Three Laws.** Unfortunately, The Three Laws explain entirely too much bad behavior in 2023 America: First, women drive men crazy; second, children drive women crazy; and third, recreational water (at the beach, at the lake, at the river) drives everybody crazy.

**4. One of the Christian's main tasks in this life is to help pass on the Church's faith to others.** That faith

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was received and established by the prophets and the apostles. It coheres. It makes sense, like a beautiful mosaic made up of many colorful shards. If each shard stands for a truth of the Church's faith, when a shard is removed or replaced, the mosaic is altered and compromised. The Church's faith deepens by developing its Tradition—not by breaking from it. The Church's faith includes these strong truths: human life is a gift from God; and abortion and euthanasia are refusals of that gift. The Church was pro-life centuries before the Republican Party adopted pro-life politics.

**5. The Church's faith is proposed to, not imposed upon, people.** As Pope John Paul II taught: "The Church imposes nothing; she proposes [the truth] like a lover to the beloved." Therefore, teach patiently and consistently, and encourage others to do the same.

**6. In your church or on your church committee, thoughtfully and thoroughly propose the Church's Gospel of Life once**—through teaching, preaching, writing, or personal conversation. Then reinforce that teaching every so often. Do not nag or browbeat people with the Church's teaching.

**7. In the midst of political campaigns, help people to see that scientific and biological arguments against abortion are especially useful in the public arena.**

**8. Invite questions from, listen to, and respond to those on the other side.** Only after listening should you defend the Church's teaching.

**9. While being determined and earnest in your witness, always maintain joy and a sense of humor.**

**10. The truth will prevail in God's good time.** Therefore, trust in God's providence.

This eleventh point was offered at the conclusion of the seminar: Those whom you would change you must first love, and they must know that you love them. Rev. Richard John Neuhaus (1936-2009) often repeated this line and noted that it came from Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The participants in the workshop were engaged and engaging. They probably attended because they were personally encountering "apathy and opposition" in their churches and communities—even from pastors and priests. In their comments and questions, they revealed that their circumstances and challenges varied, and that their frustrations were real. It was fitting and proper that the workshop's last word was on love. According to St. Paul, love is first of all patient. (PTS) ♥

## RESURRECTION AND PENTECOST AT DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL

Duke Divinity School's 2023 Baccalaureate Sermon was preached by The Reverend Dr. J. Warren Smith, a professor of historical theology at the school. He joyfully proclaimed how the Resurrection of our Lord and the Pentecost birth of the Church are joined together: "...

without the giving of [the] Spirit, the resurrection would be incomplete. Without the Spirit, the resurrection of Jesus would be...a one-off display of God's power. But the risen Jesus is not an ordinary man; he is the second Adam. Because he is the first born from the dead, he is, as Gregory of Nyssa put it, first born of the new creation. For Jesus' life, death, and resurrection inaugurated a new reality. And through the gift of the Spirit, we even now are participants in that new reality. The Church is the community of the new creation because the Spirit of the risen Lord dwells within us. This is Paul's understanding of baptism as being raised to new life...."

Later in the sermon, Dr. Smith indicated moral consequences that follow from Resurrection and Pentecost: "When my daughter was going to her first meeting of Church Council, I made a point of driving her myself. When we arrived at the doors of the church and I let her out, I said to her, 'Remember who you're dealing with. The folks in there are sinners in the process of being made saints. That means sometimes you will hear words and see deeds that are saintly. And other times...well, they may be going on to perfection, but they have a long way to go.'

"And so as we drop you [graduates] off at the doors of the church to begin your ministry—whether it is in a local congregation, a social service ministry, or a classroom—I would say to you the same thing, 'Remember who you [are] dealing with, but also hold fast to the miracle of Easter. For you will not be able to minister to your people as they need, you will not love them as they need you to love them, you will not guide them as they need to be guided, and you will not be able to persevere with them as they need you to persevere, unless you believe that the Holy Spirit, the resurrecting power of God, is already at work in them and has been at work long before you got there....'"

This was a Biblical, truthful, and masterful sermon for divinity-school graduates—and many others as well—to hear. Thank you, Dr. Smith. (To watch and hear the entire sermon, google "2023 Duke Divinity School Baccalaureate Service," and go 2:20:50 to begin the sermon.) (PTS) ♥

## MORAL CLARITY IN THE COURTROOM

To stop abortions, Father Fidelis Moscinski placed locks on the entrance gate of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Hempstead, NY. Then he nonviolently blocked its entrance. He was arrested and later found guilty of a FACE Act violation. Addressing the judge, he delivered a sentencing-hearing statement; his language is strong, but his claims are true: "Your Honor, I offer the following comments in order to assist you in imposing the most appropriate sentence in my case.

"My actions on July 7, 2022 were done because Planned Parenthood as an organization is in the business of

*“Margaret Sanger ... was a known racist and eugenicist who once opined that ‘We do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population.’”*

killing. Every procured abortion that occurs on it premises constitutes the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. Furthermore, these bloody and violent acts also cause great spiritual and psychological harm to the mother of the child. All of my actions then and now are directed solely towards preventing the murder of defenseless children and the wounding of their mothers.

“On that day I was also aware of the evidence compiled by the House Select Panel on Infant Lives that Planned Parenthood, contrary to federal law, profits from the harvesting and selling of the body parts of unborn children. This grisly trade in human tissues and organs is deemed by many as revolting and sickening since it reduces human beings to mere objects that can be bought and sold. But perhaps this practice of Planned Parenthood should not surprise us since its founder, Margaret Sanger, was a known racist and eugenicist who once opined that ‘We do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population.’”

“Now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned, and we have been delivered from the delusion that abortion was ever a constitutional right, we are still sadly burdened with the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act [FACE Act]. This pseudo-law seeks to cloak the act of killing preborn children under the euphemistic and Orwellian language of ‘reproductive health care.’ I am not guilty of violating this law because this law cannot be seen as anything other than null and void since it attempts to give legal protection to actions which are intrinsically evil and unjust.

“I recognize that this view may not be shared by your Honor. I would like you to know that I find the pernicious error of legal positivism both logically incoherent and immensely destructive in practice. The tragic and shameful history of legalized slavery in the South and the more recent genocides of the twentieth century should be more than sufficient to show us the folly of simply accepting something as ‘legal’ because it is the product of some legislative or judicial process. Would it not be much better to acknowledge the truth that there must be a necessary and intrinsic connection between our civil laws and the natural moral law written on the human heart, knowable by human reason, and revealed authoritatively by God Himself in the Ten Commandments?

“If you are, as I suspect, unwilling to correct your earlier mistaken judgment finding me guilty, then I suggest that you can still somewhat mitigate the injustice this court has perpetrated by giving me the most lenient

sentence possible. Thank you.” (Steven Ertelt, “Catholic Priest Sentenced to 6 Months in Prison for Saving Babies from Abortions,” LifeNews.com website, June 28, 2023)

Though sentenced to 6 months in prison, Fr. Moscinski could have received much more time. ♥

## **WATSON AND WILLIMON ON THE BISHOPS**

Many believe that the schism occurring in The United Methodist Church is due, in large part, to the church’s bishops straying from their church’s doctrine and discipline, and paying no price for their disobedience. On that claim, Dr. Watson and Bp. Willimon concur. (See Watson’s article “‘A Spirit of Governance’: On Bishops in the Global Methodist Church” [Firebrand Magazine website, January 10, 2023] and, written with a spoonful of snark in response to Watson, Willimon’s article “On the Disciplining of Bishops” [Ministry Matters website, February 21, 2023].) However, they are talking about different bishops. Dr. Watson points to bishops whose disobedience manifests against denominational doctrine and discipline particularly related to human sexuality, while Bp. Willimon is concerned about a former United Methodist bishop who apparently served two denominations at the same time.

### **Expectations for Bishops**

Before sorting through the Watson and Willimon critiques of the bishops, a quick, general review of Methodism’s stated expectations for bishops is in order.

Since the Global Methodist Church has not yet gathered in a General-Conference-like setting, it has not yet officially adopted its first Book of Doctrines and Discipline. Therefore, it is not surprising that Dr. Watson turns, in his article, to Biblical and Patristic (that is, Early Church) sources to help sketch the office of bishop—including how bishops should best discipline other bishops. (Since Watson witnessed United Methodist bishops breaking church doctrine and discipline without consequence, and thereby rocking their denomination, he, for good reason, emphasizes that bishops should faithfully teach church doctrine and uphold church discipline—and hold other bishops accountable to do the same.) So Watson returns to the sources—to the New Testament and to the Church Fathers.

Nor does Bp. Willimon mention what United Methodists expect from their bishops. As a retired bishop, he could certainly recall what those expectations are.

Throughout its 50-year history, The United Methodist Church’s Constitution has plainly stated: “There shall be a Council of Bishops composed of all the bishops of The United Methodist Church. The council shall meet at least once a year and plan for the general oversight and promotion of the temporal and spiritual interests of the

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

entire Church and for carrying into effect the rules, regulations, and responsibilities prescribed and enjoined by the General Conference....” (Paragraph 47. *Article III., The Book of Discipline* [2016], p. 40, emphasis added). General oversight of the whole church, one would presume, must begin with the Council of Bishops challenging its own members “to look over one another in love”—that is, to hold each other accountable to church doctrine and discipline.

In addition, The United Methodist Church’s *Book of Discipline*—hammered out during General Conferences—now outlines the general duties of bishops: “As followers of Jesus Christ, bishops are authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church. The role and calling forth of the bishop is to exercise oversight and support of the Church in its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The basis of such discipleship of leadership (episkope) lies in discipline and a disciplined life.” (emphasis added, Paragraph 403. *The Role of Bishops and District Superintendents*, 1., p. 324) The discipleship of individual bishops, it seems, would require the mutual discipline of bishops—in a word, accountability.

During The Service for the Consecration of Bishops, those elected to episcopal office are instructed in their new ministry: “You are called to guard the faith, to seek the unity, and to exercise the discipline of the whole Church... you are called to preach and teach the truth of the gospel to all God’s people....” Later in the service, they are asked—“Will you guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church against all that is contrary to God’s Word?”—and they are to respond: “I will, for the love of God.” Late in the service, the newly consecrated bishops are challenged: “Faithfully administer discipline, but do not forget mercy....” (*The United Methodist Book of Worship* [1992], pp. 703 and 706) Evidently, the church believes that discipline and mercy go together.

Stitched together, these fragments of United Methodist tradition suggest what The United Methodist Church expects of its bishops—teaching and defending doctrine, upholding church discipline, and holding other bishops accountable on these basic tasks. Expecting bishops to discipline bishops in error, the *Discipline* lays out such processes.

#### **Willimon’s Charge and the Methodist Mess**

In his article, Bp. Willimon raises serious concerns about an unnamed bishop, who seemed to teach church doctrine and uphold church discipline. And yet, according to Willimon, he apparently served The United Methodist Church by day (in the open) and the Global Methodist Church by night (discreetly). Willimon’s concern compels addressing the matter of schism and how it is playing out.

*“During The Service for the Consecration of Bishops, those elected to episcopal office are instructed in their new ministry: ‘You are called to guard the faith, to seek the unity, and to exercise the discipline of the whole Church...you are called to preach and teach the truth of the gospel to all God’s people....’ ”*

With the adoption of Paragraph 2553 by the 2019 General Conference, The United Methodist Church should allow all its local churches and all clergy (including bishops) to be able to exercise their consciences (hopefully, formed by the Word of God) to discern where God wants them to

connect—with The United Methodist Church, or possibly with another denomination (the Global Methodist Church or another denomination) or no denomination. For the bishop to whom Willimon points, such discernment and decision-making must have been messy and difficult. Even so, this particular bishop should not have been denied the exercise of conscience. That is, this bishop, against his own conscience, should not have been made into an unwilling captive of The United Methodist Church.

Here, a bit of understanding for this particular bishop may be in order. We might imagine that, for years, this bishop swam against the Council of Bishop’s stream. Perhaps he opposed the One Church Plan. Perhaps he insisted that a Traditional Plan be placed before the 2019 General Conference. Perhaps he was isolated and shunned by bishops who loudly promised in public that they would not abide by the decisions of the 2019 General Conference. Perhaps the Council of Bishops was not nearly as “inclusive” as it claimed to be. Perhaps this bishop sensed he was being pushed out of the Council of Bishops and The United Methodist Church. These possibilities, if true in part or in full, could help to explain why this bishop seemed to be attempting, for a while, dual ecclesial citizenship—in The United Methodist Church and in the Global Methodist Church.

Right now, because of the unfolding schism, because of adding to the disunity of Christ’s Church, all United Methodists (including bishops) and all Global Methodists (including bishops) should admit to having dirty hands. Some of our hands are dirty because we relentlessly carp at the bishops. Some because we are blinded by pride and self-righteousness. Some because we have agendas that we assume were etched on tablets brought down from Sinai. Some because we did not stand up for the church’s true unity in Jesus Christ and the faith of the apostles. Some because we have a “party spirit” (Galatians 5:20, RSV). Some because we are on a “power trip.” Some because we have a dilapidated understanding of the Church, its doctrine, and its discipline. Only God can clean our hands through His forgiveness—upon our repentance. Only God can humble us enough to teach us what it means to be the Church, and how bishops should faithfully minister to and for a church.

#### **A Sad Impasse, but a Blessed Agreement**

Consider the different social locations of Dr. Watson and Bp. Willimon.

Watson is an ordained elder in the Global Methodist Church, academic, administrator, esteemed author, and editor. As an observer of the Council of Bishops, he writes from outside the council. His sources are often Biblical and historical-theological.

Willimon is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, academic, administrator, globe-trotting preacher, retired bishop, and author of countless books and articles. He has been a participant in many meetings of the Council of Bishops and with smaller groups of bishops—in-person and by Zoom. He has seen, up close and personal, the compromises that bishops have made—small at first, but growing in seriousness—that ultimately led to public, in-your-face breaking of church doctrine and discipline. He heard the compromises asserted, rationalized, justified. Perhaps he let them go and said nothing to oppose them. (After all, it is nearly impossible for us United Methodists to raise concerns when our ideas are overwhelmingly opposed. When opposed by a group, we—all of us—tend to sink into silence.)

From their two different ecclesiastical locations, Watson and Willimon seem to have reached an apparent impasse. Watson sees clearly that disobedient bishops—departing from doctrine, disobeying discipline on human sexuality, and escaping discipline themselves—have brought havoc into The United Methodist Church. Willimon questions the transparency, and perhaps the integrity, of a bishop caught between two denominations. From two different places, concerned with two different sets of bishops, Watson and Willimon admit and approach the breakdown of church discipline among Methodist bishops today. **However, they do agree: they agree that bishops should teach church doctrine, uphold church discipline, and abide by the church's rule of law in its entirety; and that bishops should hold each other accountable all the while.**

Readers, savor this basic agreement. Dr. Watson and Bp. Willimon are two of the brightest, most constructive and controversial theologians in Methodism today. Most basically, they are on the same side—the side of Jesus Christ and His Church over against an openly hostile, vicious, lying world. And they agree that bishops must minister in ways that advance the church's doctrine and discipline, observe the church's rule of law, and practice mutual accountability.

If the episcopal office is not renewed among Methodists, what should be anticipated? Well, bishops lacking doctrine and discipline will continue to rock The United Methodist Church. And in a few years or a couple of decades, bishops lacking doctrine and discipline (and probably hoisting the banners of “love” and “compassion”) will make an appearance in the Global Methodist Church and begin to tear at its unity. Both prospects are troubling.

So, Dr. Watson and Bp. Willimon, keep pushing your churches to have bishops who teach doctrine, uphold discipline, and look over one another in love—for the sake of Jesus Christ and His Church. (PTS) ♥

## UNITED METHODISM AGAINST THE DISAFFILIATING

*On March 26, several leaders of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church closed, and seized the property of, Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church in Wilmington, NC. They did this against the will of most members of the congregation. On June 15-16, the North Carolina Annual Conference, in Greenville, NC, debated and then voted on whether or not to approve the closure of Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church. After six brief speeches on the closure—three in favor and three opposed—delegates voted, by hand, to support the closure. What follows is the text of a three-minute speech that was prepared for, but not presented to, the conference.*

I rise to oppose the closure of the Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church in Wilmington.

The conference narrative on Fifth Avenue Church is from [elites], from above. Now hear a narrative from below.

Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church. Located near downtown Wilmington. Founded 1847. Witnessed. Grew. Declined. Stabilized. Aged. Attempted outreach. Sunday after Sunday, for 176 years, the Word preached, Sacraments offered. They love one another.

*[As a sign of good faith and solidarity, thirteen Fifth Avenue Church members were here in Greenville yesterday!]*

Last fall, Fifth Avenue Church met to discuss disaffiliation.

In January, it formally inquired.

In February, the Church Council voted for the disaffiliation process.

On March 26, church members gathered for a meeting with the District Superintendent. The Bishop, and others, appeared. Surprise! Members were told the church was closed. Locks were changed. Shock!

Also on March 26, the conference announced that this “church closure [will bring] rebirth and opportunity.”

“[E]xigent circumstances” required closure. Conference communications neglected money, though church property is valued over \$2,000,000.

The day after, the congregation wrote: “Fifth Avenue never asked for, agreed to or wanted the closure...[not] given a chance to participate in the decision to close... devastated and brokenhearted by the closure...forced upon them.”

The United Methodist way. The United Methodist way is conversational and communal, collegial and collaborative, with give-and-take and checks-and-balances. The United Methodist way limits the strong and lifts the weak.

The closure of Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church violated the United Methodist way. It was a raw exercise of power.

There is only one way we, as an annual conference, can reject this coercive action: vote against closure. I challenge you: Vote! Against! Closure!

Our Lord spoke of rulers lording it over the ruled. Then He said to His Church: “It will not be so among you....” (Matthew 20:25, NRSV). (PTS) ♥

## ORIGINAL SIN IN METHODISM: GOES AWAY, GOES WOKE, GOES GOSPEL

*Warning: There is a Wesleyan precedent for what you are about to read. In 1727, Rev. John Wesley preached “On Corrupting the Word of God” about how preachers can serve, or stifle, God’s Word. And in 1741, Rev. Wesley preached “Hypocrisy in Oxford” to an elite university congregation about its departures from church doctrine and practice. So, as you read below, be not offended!*

Since congregations and clergy began disaffiliating from The United Methodist Church, those remaining United Methodist have been defensively repeating this mantra: “Our doctrinal standards have not changed and will not change. So there is no need to depart.”

But what if most United Methodists do not give a darned about our church’s doctrinal standards? Or they do not even realize such standards exist? What if that is our status quo?

This article attempts to swim against the stream. What follows attends to one doctrinal standard of The United Methodist Church: the doctrine of original sin.

In Romans 5:12, St. Paul plants the truth of original sin in the Church’s apostolic faith: “sin came into the world through one man....” (NRSV) Original sin is the sin of Adam, which is born in all human beings who follow Adam. This doctrine asserts not only the contagion of Adam’s corrupting sin to all of humanity but also the Fall’s catastrophic impact on all of creation. This world is broken, as is every person in it.

### Original Sin Goes Away

When was the last time you heard a sermon on original sin? Better yet, when was the last time you heard original sin even mentioned in a sermon? A long time ago. Right? This phrase, original sin, seems to have been banished from United Methodist sanctuaries, if not from the everyday United Methodist vocabulary.

There is a reason—an historical reason—why original sin is among Today’s Least Popular Sermon Topics. Here is one way to tell that story.

In the early 1900s, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) was a young pastor in Detroit. Later he became an influential professor and public theologian at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. His sermons were so eagerly followed that they were sometimes covered by The New York Times on page one. Niebuhr was gifted at taking Biblical categories and truths, and applying them to the

social and political realities of his time and place.

Unlike many American theologians of that time, Niebuhr took sin seriously. Dr. Sidney Ahlstrom (1919-1984), in his Religious History of the American People (Yale University Press, 1972), wrote this about Dr. Niebuhr: “Above all, [Niebuhr] sought to make [people] fully aware of the depths of human sinfulness.” (p. 942)

In 1939, Reinhold Niebuhr delivered the Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh University in Scotland. The lectures were later published in two volumes under the title The Nature and Destiny of Man. (Niebuhr’s book titles are rather grandiose.) In his Preface to The Nature and Destiny of Man, Niebuhr reflected: “I believed and still believe that human evil, primarily expressed in undue self-concern, is a corruption of its essential freedom and grows with its freedom. Therefore, every effort to equate evil purely with the ignorance of the mind and with the passions of the body

is confusing and erroneous. I used the traditional religious symbols of the ‘Fall’ and of ‘original sin’ to counter these conceptions. My only regret is that I did not realize that the legendary character of the one [‘Fall’] and the dubious connotations of the other [‘original sin’] would prove so offensive to the modern mind....” (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943/1964,

*“Niebuhr reflected: ‘I believed and still believe that human evil, primarily expressed in undue self-concern, is a corruption of its essential freedom and grows with its freedom. Therefore, every effort to equate evil purely with the ignorance of the mind and with the passions of the body is confusing and erroneous.’”*

Vol. I, p. viii, emphasis added)

Reinhold Niebuhr’s brother, H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), described the liberal theology, which his brother often challenged, as “vacuous.” Furthermore, H. Richard provided that memorable summary of liberal theology: a “God without wrath brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” (The Kingdom of God in America, 1937) (Thanks to Dr. James V. Heidinger II for his reference to H. Richard Niebuhr in his excellent book The Rise of Theological Liberalism and the Decline of American Methodism [Seedbed, 2017].)

According to Dr. Joshua Mitchell of Georgetown University, as early as the middle of the Second World War, Reinhold Niebuhr realized that he had failed to return original sin to the faith and message of the Protestant churches in the United States. (Joshua Mitchell, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=it-FsrwUwEg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=it-FsrwUwEg), July 29, 2022) Politely setting aside Niebuhr and original sin, the American churches preferred the God of Love without a hint of judgment. So original sin had lost out, and Niebuhr knew it.

### Original Sin Goes Woke

Evicted from then-mainline Protestant churches, the doctrine of original sin did not die. Dr. Mitchell reports: “People have abandoned the churches because the churches wanted the God of Love but not the God of Judgment. So

the churches have gone their merry way speaking [only] about...God as love. But if the Bible is right, the first human experience is the experience of transgression [or sin; think Adam and Eve or original sin], [and if] the churches' turn away from it, the people will look for a way of thinking through transgression that the churches are not offering."

Leaving the Church of the God of Love, sniffing around for an account of transgression, some of the seekers wandered into the realm of politics—particularly identity politics. Black Lives Matter. Feminism. LGBTQIA+. Transgenderism. Latinx. And so on. In identity politics, people learn that the world should be divided into the innocent and the guilty, the pure and the impure, the sin-free and the sin-full. The innocent are not corrupted by original sin. Only the guilty are stained and twisted and corrupted by the sin of Adam. Needing a way to be forgiven, the guilty are forever dealing with, and striving to overcome, their guilt. According to Dr. Mitchell, the guilty are "daily performing a Passover ritual in which they are attempting to demonstrate that social death should pass over them, because they [too] are innocent. So Black Lives Matter signs, Pray for Ukraine signs, climate-change signs" are planted on front lawns. Here we are dealing with religion, not politics, not science, according to Dr. Mitchell. Unfortunately, "the churches cannot help us, because all they want to talk about is the God of Love and not the God of Judgment."

So the identity groups willingly take out their rage, that stems from their experience of injustice, on those they deem guilty of original sin. These identity groups scapegoat a particular group, and they take out their suffering, betrayal, and anger on that scapegoated group. This scapegoating never leads to reconciliation or resolution or even conclusion. This scapegoating goes on and on and on.

### **Original Sin Returns to the Gospel**

The Church's historic faith is dramatically, totally different from identity-group ideology that divides the innocent from the guilty, the pure from the impure. The Church's holy scripture declares the words of St. Paul: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NRSV). The Church's apostolic faith declares: the sin of Adam is the sin of every person (except Jesus Christ).

The truth of original sin is buried in The United Methodist Church's doctrinal standards. These standards are seldom studied, read, or consulted. Even so, Article VII in The Articles of Religion addresses original sin. It boldly declares: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature

inclined to evil, and that continually." (The Book of Discipline [2016], Paragraph 104. Section 3, p. 67)

Therefore, for Methodists, original sin is not about making a few bad choices, here and there, throughout life—especially before age 30. Original sin is not about living like Adam. That downplays the cataclysmic impact of Adam's Fall on all of humanity and on all of creation.

Original sin is about the corruption—corruption!—of every human being.

That corruption originates with Adam and Eve, and it is passed to all.

That corruption pushes every person far from original righteousness, from God.

That corruption bends our nature—our heart, mind, and body—toward evil.

That corruption directs us toward evil in a continuing way.

Article VIII--Of Free Will follows Article VII. This article on free will actually asserts that natural humanity, apart from God, does not have free will! The article warns that each and every human being is so corrupt that, on our

own, we cannot choose to leave evil behind. On our own, we cannot resolve morally and spiritually to improve ourselves. On our own, we cannot decide to repent. Without God's help, we cannot have faith in God. Without God's grace, we

cannot love God or our neighbor. Because of original sin, lacking free will, humanity is stuck in sin and corruption, evil and death. According to the doctrinal standards of The United Methodist Church, each and every person has no escape from original sin. That is misery.

Into this misery comes the Word: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16, NRSV) God the Father sends God the Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, into history, into Israel. At the end of His public ministry, dying on a cross outside Jerusalem, Jesus accepts onto Himself the sins of the world. Jesus becomes the scapegoat for all—not just those deemed guilty by identity groups.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted: "While we are distinguishing the pious from the ungodly, the good from the wicked, the noble from the mean, God makes no distinction at all in His love for the [fallen] man. He does not permit us to classify men and the world according to our own standards and to set ourselves up as judges over them." (Ethics, p. 71) As the love of God, Jesus pays the price for the sins of all—not just for the sins of one group.

"He breaks the power of canceled sin, he sets the prisoner free; his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me." ("O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing") Only with this Gospel can the Church teach the truth about life and abortion, marriage and sexuality. (PTS) ♥

*"The Church's historic faith is dramatically, totally different from identity-group ideology that divides the innocent from the guilty, the pure from the impure."*

## PROPERTY LAWS OF A TODDLER (EVIDENCES OF ORIGINAL SIN)

Test this on the toddlers in your home or church...!

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks just like mine, it's mine.
8. If I saw it first, it's mine.
9. If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.
10. If it's broken, it's yours.

(Deb Lawrence, Mission to the Philippines with SEND International, quoted in Prokope, November/December 1992, p. 3) ♥

## ALFRED HITCHCOCK ON TRUTH AND LIFE

Sir Alfred Hitchcock's movie "Rope" appeared in 1948. James Stewart plays Rupert, a prep-school headmaster and publisher who enjoys shocking people with his moral claims—such as, murder is good. After discovering that two of his former students—Brandon and Phillip—have taken the life of their acquaintance, David, Rupert engages them in a memorable conversation.

Brandon begins by addressing Rupert: "Remember the discussion we had before.... Remember what we said: the lives of inferior beings are unimportant. Remember we said, we have always said, you and I, that moral concepts of good and evil, and right and wrong, do not hold for the intellectually superior. Remember, Rupert...? That is all we have done. That is all Philip and I have done. He and I have lived what you and I have talked. I knew you would understand, because you have to. Don't you see? You have to."

In response, Rupert offers this stirring speech: "Brandon, until this very moment, this world and the people in it have always been dark and incomprehensible to me. And I have tried to clear my way with logic and superior intellect. And you have thrown my own words right back in my face, Brandon. You were right to. If nothing else, a man should stand by his words. But you have given my words a meaning I had never dreamed of, and you have tried to twist them into a cold, logical excuse for your ugly murder. Well, they were never that, Brandon. And you cannot make them that. There must have been something deep inside you, from the very start, that let you do this thing. But there has always been something deep inside me that would never let me do it, and would never let me be a party to it now....

"I mean that tonight you have made me ashamed of every concept I ever had of superior or inferior beings. But I thank you for that shame. Because now I know that each of us is a separate human being, Brandon—with the right to live and work and think, as individuals, but with an obligation for the society we live in. By what right do you dare to say that there are a superior few to which you belong? By what right did you decide that that [murdered] boy in there was inferior and therefore could be killed? Did you think you were God, Brandon? Is that what you thought when you choked the life out of him? Is that what you thought when you served food from his grave? [The deceased was dumped in a cabinet, which served as a table top during a party.] Well I do not know what you thought or what you are, but I know what you have done: you've murdered! You have strangled the life out of a fellow human being who could live and love as you never could—and never will again....

"It is not what I am going to do, Brandon; it is what society is going to do. I do not know what that will be. But I can guess, and I can help. You are going to die [by capital punishment], Brandon! Both of you! You are going to die."

After Rupert opens a high-rise apartment window and fires three shots from a handgun into the night air, a noisy crowd assembles, a police car with sirens screaming approaches, and the movie ends.

And Rupert's speech rings in our hearts and minds. (PTS) ♥

## YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT ...

### • Lifewatch is living near a financial edge.

Our needs are still great, even after your thoughtful response to the June 1st fundraising note.

We still need your help. Lifewatch is feeling a real financial pinch.

Only with your help can our witness for the Gospel of Life continue. Please donate to Lifewatch (if you have not done so) in one of three ways: first, send a check, made payable to "Lifewatch," to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338; second, give stocks (first contact Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office in MO); and third, transfer earnings from your IRA directly to Lifewatch and possibly save on your taxes (again, contact Mrs. Evans). Many, many thanks for your response—including your prayers.



● Dr. Michael New estimates that the **“Hyde Amendment has saved 2,566,968 babies from abortion since 1976.”** The Hyde Amendment, you will remember, prohibited federal dollars from being paid for most abortions obtained by Medicaid patients. (The article’s title is quoted above [LifeNews, June 28, 2023].)

● **Most states have safe-haven**

**laws.** Such laws encourage parents to surrender their newborns to those who will care for the little ones, and they discourage parents from abandoning their newborns to death. Monica Kelsey founded the Safe Haven Baby Box organization to provide safe boxes in which safe-haven babies can be legally deposited. The boxes are monitored, heated and cooled, and built into exterior walls of fire departments, police stations, and hospitals. That way newborns can be left by parents on the outside; the little ones can then be rescued and cared for by Good Samaritans on the inside.

In 2021, Kentucky adopted a Safe Haven Baby Box Law. So a box was installed at a Bowling Green, KY fire department. In mid-February 2023, parents left their newborn in that baby box, and the child was rescued 90 seconds later by fire-department employees inside their building. (Bridget Sielicki, “First baby saved with newly-installed Safe Haven Baby Box in Kentucky,” February 15, 2022, Live Action website)

Since 2016, these baby boxes have saved 24 babies. Each one was a picture of salvation. A picture of deliverance. A contemporary picture of what was done for baby Moses and baby Jesus. Thanks be to God.!

*“Since 2016, these Safe Haven Baby Boxes have saved 24 babies. Each one was a picture of salvation. A picture of deliverance. A contemporary picture of what was done for baby Moses and baby Jesus. Thanks be to God!”*

● **Illinois is a destination state for abortion.** That is, many women travel from out-of-state into Illinois to get an abortion. Wisely, the Pro-Life Action League placed a billboard beside westbound I-90, from pro-life Indiana into pro-choice Illinois. It reads: “Looking for a sign?/ This is it./CancelMyAbortion.com,” with a cardiograph image in the background. The website leads women to information and

resources that help them keep their babies. (Micalah Bilger, “Pro-Life Billboard Encourage Abortion Travelers to Cancel Abortion, Save Their Baby,” LifeNews.com, June 8, 2023) Simple. Direct. Hopeful. And smart. Because of this ad, more than a few little ones are sure to live. Again, thanks be to God.

● **See the movie “Sound of Freedom.”** It reports on one man’s crusade against child trafficking. The movie loudly declares: God’s children are not for sale.

● **Harrison Butker is the Super Bowl-winning kicker of the Kansas City Chiefs.** He has shaken up the overly sensitive again. While delivering a commencement address at Georgia Tech, he declared: “I don’t care if you have a successful career.... In the end, no matter how much money you attain, none of it will matter if you are alone and devoid of purpose.... I can offer one controversial antidote that I believe will have a lasting impact for generations to come. Get married and start a family.” (The Point, “The Best Advice the Class of 2023 Will Hear,” email from Breakpoint Daily from the Colson Center, May 11, 2023) Thank you, Mr. Butker, for speaking the truth in love to the Georgia Tech graduates and to many others as well.

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# Lifewatch

Taskforce of  
United Methodists on  
Abortion and Sexuality

P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338

09/01/23

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- \* Safe Haven Baby Boxes
- \* Original Sin goes "woke" in the UMC

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● **Harrison Butker strikes again.** On June 5, the Kansas City Chiefs visited the White House to be recognized for their February Super Bowl victory. Mr. Butker wore a tie that declares "Vulnerari Praesidio," which is Latin for "Protect the Most Vulnerable." Said Butker in a statement the next day, "I want to give the most vulnerable, the unborn, a voice at a place where every effort has been made to allow and normalize the

tragic termination of their lives." That place, of course, is President Biden's White House, which is aggressively pro-choice, even pro-abortion, to the point of drawing the attention, correction, and admonishment of the Catholic bishops in the United States. (Joe Bukuras, "NFL champ Harrison Butker makes a statement with pro-life necktie at White House visit," Catholic News Agency website, June 6, 2023) Mr. Butker, speak on!

● "There is no such thing as new truth; error might be old or new; but truth is as old as the universe." In 1863, Frederick Douglass (1817/8-1895), the former slave and then abolitionist, uttered those words at Hillsdale College in his lecture "Popular Error and Unpopular Truth."

● *Vulnerari praesidio.* "Protect the most vulnerable."

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

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