

## CONFESSIONS OF A CENTRIST

I have heretofore styled myself as a Centrist when it comes to overall classification within the combination of leanings within The United Methodist Church [UMC] on theological, fiscal, sociological, and secular political ideological matters. But it is increasingly becoming obvious to me, as I suspect it is to others, that in the post General Conference 2024 [GC24] Church, that is unrealistic. Being a Centrist implies necessarily that there are significant numbers of people further to the Left as well as further to the Right, or those who seem to prefer to be styled as Progressives, and those who choose to be identified as Traditionalists.

Post GC24 there simply is no significant voice of Traditionalists remaining in the UMC either because they've all gone somewhere else or because they are choosing to be silent. In any case what I'm observing is that the Progressive voice is the only voice that is being heard in United Methodist leadership, and an erstwhile Centrist like me has become, by the process of elimination, the voice of the Right. And I am no longer in any position of leadership, as I suspect is true of almost all people in my same category. We are being systematically and intentionally excluded, so that our UM leadership is working in an echo chamber in which the only sounds they hear are their own voices coming back at them in almost perfectly reproduced form.

The only comfort to be found here is that this kind of imbalance is likely not sustainable, meaning it probably won't endure.

**Lonnie D. Brooks, Facebook page, August 30, 2025, 6:36 p.m.**

[Mr. Brooks helped lead the Alaska Conference, Jurisdictional Conferences, and General Conferences.]

## WE SHALL NOT WEARY, WE SHALL NOT REST

by **The Reverend Richard John Neuhaus**

Once again this year, the National Right to Life Convention is partly a reunion of veterans from battles past and partly a youth rally of those recruited for the battles to come. And that is just what it should be. The pro-life movement that began in the 20th century laid the foundation for the pro-life movement of the 21st century. We have been at this a long time, and we are just getting started. All that has been, and all that will be, is prelude to, and anticipation of, an indomitable hope. All that has been, and that will be, is premised upon the promise of Our Lord's return in glory when, as we read in the Book of Revelation, "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the

former things have passed away." (21:4, RSV, here and below) And all things will be new.

### **The Cause of Life**

That is the horizon of hope that, from generation to generation, sustains the great human rights cause of our time and all times—the cause of life. We contend, and we contend relentlessly, for the dignity of the human person, of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God, destined from eternity for eternity—every human person, no matter how weak or how strong, no matter how young or how old, no matter how productive or how burdensome, no matter how welcome or how inconvenient. Nobody is a nobody; nobody is unwanted. All are wanted by God, and therefore to be respected, protected, and cherished by us.

We shall not weary, we shall not rest, until every unborn child is protected in law and welcomed in life.

We shall not weary, we shall not rest, until all the elderly who have run life's course are protected against despair and abandonment, protected by the rule of law and the bonds of love. We shall not weary, we shall not rest, until every young woman is given the help she needs to recognize the problem of pregnancy as the gift of life. We shall not weary, we shall not rest, as we stand guard at the entrance gates and the exit gates of life, and at every step along the way of life, bearing witness in word and deed to the dignity of the human person—of every human person.

Against the encroaching shadows of the culture of death, against forces commanding immense power and wealth, against the perverse doctrine that a woman's dignity depends upon her right to destroy her child, against what St. Paul calls the principalities and powers of the present time, this convention renews our resolve that we shall not weary, we shall not rest, until the culture of life is reflected in the rule of law and lived in the law of love.

### **The Cause of Life: A Long Journey**

It has been a long journey, and there are still miles and miles to go. Some say it started with the notorious *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 when, by what Justice Byron White called an act of "raw judicial power," the United States Supreme Court wiped from the books of all fifty states every law protecting the unborn child. But it goes back long before that. Some say it started with the agitation for "liberalized abortion law" in the 1960s when the novel doctrine was proposed that a woman cannot be fulfilled unless she has the right to destroy her child. But it goes back long before that. It goes back to the movements for eugenics and racial and ideological cleansing of the last century.

Whether led by enlightened liberals, such as Margaret Sanger [1879-1966, founder of Planned Parenthood], or brutal totalitarians, whose names live in infamy, the doctrine and the practice were that some people stood in the way of progress and were therefore non-persons, living, as it was said, "lives unworthy of life." But it goes back even before that. It goes back to the institution of slavery in which human beings were declared to be chattel property to be bought and sold and used and discarded at the whim of their masters. It goes way on back.

As Pope John Paul the Great [1920-2005] wrote in his historic message *Evangelium Vitae* [*The Gospel of Life*, 1995], the culture of death goes all the way back to that fateful afternoon when Cain struck down his brother Abel, and the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And Cain answered, "[A]m I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." (Genesis 4) The voice of the blood of brothers and sisters beyond numbering cry out from the slave ships and battlegrounds and concentration camps and torture chambers of the past and the present. The voice of the blood of the innocents cries out from the abortuaries and sophisticated biotech laboratories of this beloved country today. Contending for the culture of life has been a very long journey, and there are still miles and miles to go.

### **The Culture of Death: Idea, Then Deed**

The culture of death is an idea before it is a deed. I expect many of us here, perhaps most of us here, can remember when we were first encountered by the idea. For me, it was in the 1960s when I was pastor of a very poor, very black, inner city parish in Brooklyn, New York. I had read that week an article by Ashley Montagu [1905-1999] of Princeton University on what he called "A Life Worth Living." He listed the qualifications for a life worth living: good health, a stable family, economic security, educational opportunity, the prospect of a satisfying career to realize the fullness of one's potential. These were among the measures of what was called "a life worth living."

And I remember vividly, as though it were yesterday, looking out the next Sunday morning at the congregation of St. John the Evangelist and seeing all those older faces creased by hardship endured and injustice afflicted, and yet radiating hope undimmed and love unconquered. And I saw that day the younger faces of children deprived of most, if not all, of those qualifications on Professor Montagu's list. And it struck me then, like a bolt of lightning, a bolt of lightning that illuminated our moral and cultural moment, that Prof. Montagu and those of like mind believed that the people of St. John the Evangelist—people whom I knew and had come to love as people of faith and kindness and endurance and, by the grace of God, hope unvanquished—it struck me then that, by the criteria of the privileged and enlightened, none of these my people had a life worth living. In that moment, I knew that a great evil was afoot. The culture of death is an idea before it is a deed.

In that moment, I knew that I had been recruited to the cause of the culture of life. To be recruited to the cause of the culture of life is to be recruited for the duration; and there is no end in sight, except to the eyes of faith.

### **When Were You Recruited?**

Perhaps you, too, can specify such a moment when you knew you were recruited. At that moment you could have said, "Yes, it's terrible that in this country alone 4,000 innocent children are killed every day, but then so many terrible things are happening in the world. Am I my infant brother's keeper? Am I my infant sister's keeper?" You could have said that, but you didn't. You could have said, "Yes, the nation that I love is betraying its founding principles—that every human being is endowed by God with inalienable rights, including, and most foundationally, the right to life. But," you could have said, "the Supreme Court has spoken and its word is the law of the land. What can I do about it?" You could have said that, but you didn't. That horror, that betrayal, would not let you go. You knew, you knew there and then, that you were recruited to contend for the culture of life, and that you were recruited for the duration.

The contention between the culture of life and the culture of death is not a battle of our own choosing. We are not the ones who imposed upon the nation the lethal logic that human beings have no rights we are bound to respect if they are too small, too weak, too dependent,

too burdensome. That lethal logic, backed by the force of law, was imposed by an arrogant elite that for almost forty years has been telling us to get over it, to get used to it.

But “We the People,” who are the political sovereign in this constitutional democracy, have not gotten over it, we have not gotten used to it, and we will never, we will never ever, agree that the culture of death is the unchangeable law of the land.

“We the People” have not and will not ratify the lethal logic of *Roe v. Wade*. That notorious decision of 1973 is the most consequential moral and political event of the last half century of our nation’s history. It has produced a dramatic realignment of moral and political forces, led by evangelicals and Catholics together, and joined by citizens beyond numbering who know that how we respond to this horror defines who we are as individuals and as a people. Our opponents, once so confident, are now on the defensive. Having lost the argument with the American people, they desperately cling to the dictates of the courts. No longer able to present themselves as the wave of the future, they watch in dismay as a younger generation recoils in horror from the bloodletting of an abortion industry so arrogantly imposed by judges beyond the rule of law.

#### **How Will This Battle End?**

We do not know, and we do not need to know, how the battle for the dignity of the human person will be resolved. God knows, and that is enough. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta and saints beyond numbering have taught us, our task is not to be successful but to be faithful. Yet in that faithfulness is the lively hope of success. We are the stronger because we are unburdened by delusions. We know that in a sinful world, far short of the promised Kingdom of God, there will always be great evils. The principalities and powers will continue to rage, but they will not prevail.

In the midst of the encroaching darkness of the culture of death, we have heard the voice of him who said, “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) Because he has overcome, we shall overcome. We do not know when; we do not know how. God knows, and that is enough. We know the justice of our cause, we trust in the faithfulness of his promise, and therefore we shall not weary, we shall not rest.

Whether, into this great contest between the culture of life and the culture of death, we were recruited many years ago or whether we were recruited only yesterday, we have been recruited for the duration. We go from this convention refreshed in our resolve to fight the good fight. We go from this convention trusting in the words of the prophet Isaiah that “[those] who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (40:31)

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The journey has been long, and there are miles and miles to go. But from this convention the word is carried to every neighborhood, every house of worship, every congressional office, every state house, every precinct of this our beloved country—from this convention the word is carried that, until every

human being created in the image and likeness of God—no matter how small or how weak, no matter how old or how burdensome—until every human being created in the image and likeness of God is protected in law and cared for in life, we shall not weary, we shall not rest. And, in this the great human rights struggle of our time and all times, we shall overcome.

--Rev. Neuhaus (1936-2009) was a Lutheran pastor and then a Roman Catholic priest. President of the Institute on Religion and Public Life in New York City, he was the founding Editor-in-Chief of *First Things*, the indispensable monthly journal on religion and public life. He delivered the above address, on July 5, to conclude the 2008 National Right to Life Convention in Crystal City, VA. It was published in the September 1, 2008 issue of *Lifewatch*. Professor Robert George, a political philosopher and public intellectual at Princeton University, called this address “the greatest pro-life speech ever given.” (PTS)♥

#### **THE LORD, A PHARISEE, A TAX COLLECTOR, AND A BISHOP**

Years ago Dr. William J. Abraham (1947-2021), as the Albert C. Outler Chair of Wesley Studies at SMU’s Perkins School of Theology, boldly claimed that *The United Methodist Church had lost the Gospel (or the Church’s faith)*. Reading the following, you should consider Dr. Abraham’s claim. (PTS)

The Gospel According to Luke tells The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in this way: “He [Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.” [Notice that the word *unjust* implies that the Pharisee understands himself as just, “not like other men;” that is, he presumes that he alone stands for justice.] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be

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

merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" (Luke 18:9-14, RSV, Gospel Lesson on Pentecost XX/Reformation Sunday/October 26, 2025)

On November 3, The United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops (COB) began their regularly scheduled meeting, which was livestreamed on the COB Facebook page. Bp. Tracy Smith Malone, the episcopal leader of the Indiana Area, remains the president of the Council of Bishops until later this year. Therefore, she delivered the President's Address. With Election Day the following day, Bp. Malone might have had partisan politics and social issues on her mind. (Though perhaps such matters might well have been on her mind, election eve or not.)

The Church catholic, including The United Methodist Church, should most definitely engage this world, including its political dimensions, with Gospel truth and faithful action. The Bible, the apostolic faith, Church history, and the doctrinal standards and the Social Principles of United Methodism make that quite clear. But such engagement—which first, last, and always confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and that His Kingdom transcends the nations and empires, democracies and dictatorships, and parties and policies of this world—requires knowledge, wisdom, and courage. Not to mention the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In the overwhelming majority of circumstances, such engagement does not involve dividing this world into the children of light and the children of darkness, and then praising the former while denouncing the latter. Unfortunately, that kind of binary, condemnatory engagement is what could be heard and sensed throughout Bp. Malone's most recent President's Address.

Now, consider the Pharisee's prayer from Luke's parable: "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get." It divides people into two groups: the good guys (starting with the Pharisee) who allegedly do God's will, and the bad guys (starting with the tax collector) who allegedly do not do God's will. Below, words, ideas, and implications from the bishop's address are placed in a binary literary form established by the Pharisee and his prayer.

What appears below, in italics, is an attempt at parody. Perhaps even humor. (Because of the way our Lord framed and told this parable, there are reasons for thinking that He intended His parable to generate a smile or two—as well as self-reflection.) Perhaps this attempt at parody will disclose some flawed theology. Your scribe hopes that you will come to see that the parody's problematic theology contrasts sharply with the message

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of the Protestant Reformation. Exactly the message of the reformers—namely, sinners are divinely justified (or pardoned) by faith—should have renewed us United Methodists on Reformation Sunday, when Luke 18:9-14 was read from our lecterns and pulpits.

### ***A Parody: We Are Not Like Others***

*God, I thank thee that we [bishops] are not like others, who too often misuse the name of Jesus Christ to justify power and privilege, hate and division. We are not like others, whose parishes are small, while our parish is the world. We are not like others, whose leadership never disrupts systems of oppression and never challenges the powerful. We are not like others, who love in politically neutral and non-transformative ways, and whose love costs nothing. We are not like others, who do not bear faithful witness to the reconciling love of God and who do not embody the radical love of Jesus Christ. We are not like others, who push false narratives. We are not like others, who use faith to divide and dominate. We are not like others, who consider the Gospel a weapon and not a wellspring of grace. We are not like others, who ignore political authoritarianism and political violence that threaten the foundations of democracy and human dignity. We are not like others, who do not see suffering migrants in the US who are seeking only safety and hope, and are met with detention and separation and despair. We are not like others, who are not disturbed about the erosion of diversity and equity and inclusion. We are not like others, who weaponize fear, manipulate truth, distort the Christian faith to serve partisan ends. We are not like others, who believe Christian nationalism is Christianity. We are not like others, who give their allegiance to human ideologies. We are not like others, who build walls, not bridges, between people. (More relevant words and phrases were in the speech and could have been used in the parody. You may view the entire President's Address on the Council of Bishops Facebook page, at November 3, 2025.)*

### **Justification by Political Correctness?**

With so many political and social references in the President's Address, the bishop might suggest that her colleagues on the Council of Bishops, her viewers of the livestream (or video), and she herself are somehow justified before God by taking acceptably progressive positions. In other words, she seems to be serving a gospel that involves justification by political correctness—not justification by faith.

Thanks to God working in the Protestant Reformation, justification by faith was recovered from the Bible and the early Church, and recognized anew in the 1500s as Gospel truth and power. A couple of centuries later, thanks to Rev. John Wesley (see his sermon "Justification by Faith") and his Methodist preachers, justification by faith was preached throughout England and beyond in the 1700s. A couple of centuries later, the doctrine of justification was included in The

United Methodist Church's doctrinal standards.

Article IX of the Articles of Religion, one of five standards of doctrine, declares: "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings...."

("Of the Justification of Man," 2020/2024 Book of Discipline, p. 68)

Furthermore, Articles VIII and IX of the Confession of Faith, another doctrinal standard, states: "We believe God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The offering Christ freely made on the cross is the perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, redeeming man from all sin, so that no other satisfaction is required." (VIII, "Reconciliation Through Christ")

"We believe we are never accounted righteous before God through our works or merit [or politics!], but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ..." (IX, "Justification and Regeneration") (2020/2024 Book of Discipline, p. 75)

Only because of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for the sins of the world, only because of what He has done for us, can we be justified by faith. Our political and social positions, though considered "correct" by bishops and others, do not justify us before God in any way, shape, or form. Our political intentions, opinions, and positions can not, and do not, move God to pardon us of our sins or to right our relationship with Him.

For this United Methodist pastor, that means my little witness—for Lifewatch, for Christ's Church and against wandering theology, for life and against abortion, and for marriage and against sexual license—does not justify me before God. Only Christ crucified and risen can, and does—as the Holy Spirit moves me to confess my sins (before and after justification) to God, trust in God to forgive me of my sins, and receive reparation of my relationship with Him. Justification by faith puts all people, all of us, on the same level: sinners who need and require God's grace (embodied and enacted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) to be saved from Adam's sin and our sins.

### **Pray Like the Tax Collector?**

Instead of speaking like the parable's Pharisee prayed, the preaching bishop might have taken her lead from Luke 18's tax collector. In her President's Address, she might have acted as if she stood in an isolated corner, gazed humbly at the floor, gestured to express remorse, and prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" That might have become a prayer heard 'round the world. It might have had a renewing and reforming influence on the Council of Bishops and throughout The United Methodist Church. After all, about the tax collector's repentant prayer, Jesus said: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the

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other [the Pharisee]; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

A bishop, on the Council of Bishops, might one day become that praying tax collector and play a strong role in reminding the larger council of basic Christianity, of justification by faith. That

could help to dislodge the council from its dogmatic commitment to what looks and sounds like justification by political correctness. Driven by the Holy Spirit, justification by faith might then help reform the council. The United Methodist Church might be reformed next. (PTS)

*A posthumous thanks to Rev. Richard L. Bryant (1974-2025) for his powerful article "Against the Piety of the Pious: Luke 18:9-14 on Full Blast and Unfiltered," which appeared at his Elevate the Discourse (substack.com) on October 22, 2025. Rev. Bryant's theological rigor and honesty influenced the writing of what appears above. May Rev. Bryant's soul enjoy the Communion of the Saints in the Church Triumphant.♥*

## **METHODISTS AND CATHOLICS CONVERGE, CONFESS, AND CONFLICT**

The World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church have been in an official dialogue since 1967. That dialogue has been conducted by the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church (MERCIC). Since the late 1960s, the dialogue has met each year; it has reported to its two church bodies its ecumenical work every five years. The dialogue's goal for Methodists and Catholics is "full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life." (p. 16, #3)

MERCIC has just published We Believe in One God: Sixty Years of Methodists and Catholics Walking Together (2025). This brief book, which aims to synthesize and summarize MERCIC's 58 years of ecumenical labor, can be read online at <https://meorome.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/we-believe-in-one-god-final-en.pdf>. We Believe in One God makes clear that Methodists and Catholics share the one Christian faith as stated by The Nicene Creed. Furthermore, the new book contains particularly notable passages on doctrine, truth, Eucharist, marriage, ordination, new teaching, conscience, natural law, and abortion.

**To those in the churches who would diminish doctrine, We Believe in One God declares:** "The Holy Spirit guides the community [i.e., church] into the fullness of truth and holiness. The desire to increase faith

by understanding and to protect it from variations and deviations has led to the formulation of doctrinal standards of faith and orthodoxy (as in the traditional creeds).” (p. 29, #45, passages here and below are underlined for emphasis)

**On truth and the church**, the book states: “Because of the promised presence of the Spirit, the church is anointed with the truth, abides in the truth and is preserved in the truth, so that Christians together can be co-workers in the truth under the leading power of the Spirit of Truth.... The treasure of the mystery of Christ is held in the earthen vessel of the daily life of the pilgrim church, a community always in need of purification and reform. All true renewal and reformation in the church is the work of the Holy Spirit, who enables the community of the faithful to hear the Word of God and to move forward together in life, faith and witness...” (p. 40, #71) All members of the church on earth are fallible creatures and sinners in need of the mercy of God. The church is totally dependent on the active presence of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of its life and teaching. Methodists and Catholics agree that Jesus promised his presence and protection to the church until the end of time....” (p. 40, #72)

**On the Eucharist or Holy Communion:** “Methodists and Catholics affirm the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This reality does not depend on the experience of the communicant, although it is only by faith that we become aware of Christ’s presence. Christ in the fullness of his being, human and divine, crucified and risen, is present in the sacrament. This presence is mediated through the sacred elements of bread and wine.” (p. 53, #110) At the same time, of course, Methodists and Catholics disagree about how, precisely, Christ is present in Communion.

**On marriage:** “Married life is a holy and honourable estate instituted by God for the mutual love and sanctification of the spouses, as well as the rearing and education of children. Christian marriage involves commitment, fidelity and permanence.... The advent of same-sex marriage has called into question our common understanding of Christian marriage. For Catholics, marriage is between a man and a woman, while some Methodists allow marriage between people of the same sex.” (p. 60, #125) Sad. Disturbing.

**On ordination:** “The clear intention of both Methodist and Catholic ordination rites is to ordain individuals into the apostolic ministry of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” (p. 64, #139) So, ordination does not propel the ordained into ministries of self-expression. Rather, the ordained are sent into the Church and the world to be servants of Jesus Christ, His Body the Church, and the apostolic faith (which witnesses most faithfully to Christ).

**On churches authorizing new teaching:** “One criterion by which new developments in Christian

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teaching and living may be judged consonant with the Scriptures is their long-term reception by the wider church. Although the Catholic Church does not believe reception of doctrine to be a necessary criterion for its truth, a doctrine that is not received by the people of God in the practice of their

faith does not achieve its intended effect in the life of the church (cf. I Thessalonians 2.13)... Only the truth itself brings about conformity to Christ in the Spirit.” (p. 72, #160) For example, the 2024 General Conference relativized United Methodist teaching on life, sexuality, and marriage. This new teaching increased the dis-ease among, and was not well received by, many (most?) staying United Methodists.

**On conscience:** “Christians have a duty to obey the voice of conscience, as one of the ways God speaks to human beings, and to respect the conscience of others. Conscience itself needs to be enlightened, instructed, corrected, and informed by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures and the discipline of the church. Individual conscience cannot be isolated from the mind of the whole church. No one’s conscience is an island.... People have both the responsibility to see that their conscience is open to authoritative guidance and the right freely and faithfully to follow that conscience.” (p. 80, #179)

**On natural law:** “We are agreed in asserting the importance of natural law which God himself enables us to perceive. In this perception, the supernatural gift of prevenient grace plays a major part. The natural law which is thus discerned stems from the generous provision of the Creator God. There is no reason for conflict between moral theologies based on natural law and those which appeal more directly to revelation.” (p. 81, #181) Methodists, do we sense the challenge? We should be open to, and receive, the guidance of natural law! After all, natural law bolsters apostolic teaching on sexuality, marriage, and human life.

**On abortion:** “We agree that the Holy Scripture affirms the sacredness and dignity of human life, and that we have a duty and obligation to defend, protect and preserve it. Our two churches are confronted with complex moral issues relating to abortion, and with wide differences between them in their teaching and interpretation which will require attention in our future dialogue.” (pp. 81-82, #184) May the Spirit lead the effort!

To close this article, I am honored to recall Professor Geoffrey Wainwright (1939-2020), a British Methodist who taught historical and ecumenical theology at Duke Divinity School for decades. Also, he served on the Lifewatch Advisory Board. Years ago, in a telephone conversation with Prof. Wainwright, your editor claimed: “When Roman Catholics and United Methodists are in theological conversation, the Catholics always bring out the best from the Methodists.” The professor agreed. (PTS)♥

## ABORTION AS A MORAL INJURY

by Pastor John B. Brown, Jr.

Large numbers of women who have an abortion (compared to women who do not have an abortion) experience some form of mental disorder, according to research studies from around the world—such as a 2011 meta-analysis by Priscilla Coleman [1].

About a year ago I heard scholar Coleman read from an unpublished article “Abortion as Morally Injurious: New Insights on Women’s Profound Suffering and Potential for Healing.” In this more recent and heavily documented article, Coleman and co-author Kay Lyn Carlson note that a significant number of women, who have an abortion even though they believe abortion to be morally wrong, experience a particular kind of suffering they call “moral injury.” As they describe and define, “Moral injury occurs when moral values are transgressed through a profound inhumanity performed by oneself or others.” [2] As such, moral injury adds a new layer of suffering that post-abortion women experience that includes deep feelings of shame, betrayal, loss of meaning, self-condemnation, and inner conflict over the moral implications of those transgressions. [3]

As I listened to Coleman’s reading, a vivid memory came to mind. It involved a man I had counseled over thirty years ago. By then in his seventies, he had traveled a considerable distance to talk with me, a stranger, and was determined to prevent any acquaintance of his from learning of his visit with me.

His story was extraordinary. Decades earlier, in the late 1940s, he, without medical training, had for a time performed abortions in his father’s funeral home. One of the unborn children he aborted he himself had fathered. In an attempt to destroy all the evidence of the abortions he had performed, he burned all the remains of the aborted unborn. But he could not destroy the memory. He found it difficult to live with himself. Though a Christian, he was haunted, torn, and deeply ashamed. He was fearful, despite much prayer, that God would never forgive him. He was suffering from moral injury—similar to what is experienced by many post-abortive women and by some men whose sexual partners were aborted. Through our discussions and prayers, and through the assurance of forgiveness that God gave him, this man finally found healing and relief. God’s grace forgave his sins and healed his moral injury. Thanks be to God!

Even so, stories such as his remind us, if we need reminding, that wounds from abortion are not shallow.

[1] Priscilla K. Coleman, “Abortion and Mental Health: Quantitative Synthesis and Analysis of Research, 1995-2009,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 199 (September 2011), 180-186.

[2] Priscilla K. Coleman and Kay Lyn Carlson, “Abortion as Morally Injurious: New Insights on Women’s Profound Suffering and Potential for Healing,” 2, unpublished article.

[3] *Ibid.*, Coleman and Carlson, p. 9.

*Pr. Brown is the author of Lilies That Fester: Abortion and the Scandal of Christian Discipleship (Resource Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock, 2022). A retired United Church of Christ (UCC) pastor, he lives in and writes from Barto, PA. ♥*

*“When Barth strongly opposed the nazification of the churches, he was also opposing practically all the elites in culture, church, and state. Serving Jesus Christ and Him alone, Barth confessed the Christian faith over against the state churches and their elite leaders. This is demonstrated most clearly by The Barmen Declaration of 1934, which Barth drafted.”*

## HAS WESLEY BEEN FORCED TO JOIN THE ESTABLISHMENT?

The Reverend John Wesley always comes across to many of us as a dissenter. A swimmer against the stream. A challenger of the establishment and its elites. A courageous soul.

At Oxford University, Wesley the student was, to some of his contemporaries, a bit too serious about the Christian faith. So he was scornfully tagged a member of the “Holy Club,” the “Bible Moths,” the “Methodists;” still, Wesley soldiered on. Later, he was barred from preaching from Church of England pulpits. Over time, “[t]he bishops and clergy [of the Church of England] came to have a common image of the Methodists as a rabble of fanatical preachers [including Wesley] and hysterical converts.” (Albert C. Outler, editor, *John Wesley*, p. 19) Later still, on invitation (!), he preached a sermon entitled “Hypocrisy in Oxford” to the elite university. In his Oxford sermon, he jabbed at his alleged betters: “But what shall we say if those whom we have accounted the pillars of our Church, and champions of our faith, do indeed betray that Church, and sap the very foundations of the faith we are taught thereby?” (edited by Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. IV, p. 395)

You get the idea. Wesley refused to take the nice, conventional, well worn, smooth path of his day. Following God’s call, he bravely blazed an uncommon, rugged trail.

John Wesley of the 18th century was similar to Karl Barth of the 20th century. At the time that Adolf Hitler was ascending to absolute power in Germany, national-socialist ideas had conquered the country. They had taken over the culture, the universities, the theological faculties, and the churches. When Barth strongly opposed the nazification of the churches, he was also opposing practically all the elites in culture, church, and state. Serving Jesus Christ and Him alone, Barth confessed the Christian faith over against the state churches and their elite leaders. This is demonstrated most clearly by The Barmen Declaration of 1934, which Barth drafted.

Today, it is so unusual to see ordained elites in The United Methodist Church—bishops, professors, general secretaries, etc.—refer to John Wesley (or Karl Barth) as their example or guide. Today’s United Methodist elites are lined up *with—not against!*—elite American opinion. Today’s United Methodist elites are backed by Harvard, *The New York Times*, NBC, Hollywood, the

administrative state, and so on. Often, their ministries do not demand much courage. After all, what they say and do usually mimics what the larger, up-scale culture is saying and doing.

*Conclusion: United Methodist elites coopt and use Rev. John Wesley—a dissenter who opposed the establishments of his day—to speak for them, for the United Methodist establishment, for the American establishment. (They do the same to Karl Barth.)*

It just seems odd to this pastor. And maybe dishonest. (PTS)♥

## FATHERHOOD ON TELEVISION!

“Blue Bloods,” the television series about four generations of a New York family dedicated to the criminal-justice system, has completed its fourteenth year and its final episode. Francis (Frank) Xavier Reagan (played by Tom Selleck), an Irish-Catholic NYC police commissioner, is often the center of the series’ attention.

In “‘Blue Bloods’ and the Power of Fatherhood” ([www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com), Web Exclusive, 12.30.24), Father Raymond J. de Souza (a Roman Catholic priest and senior fellow at Cardus, “a non-partisan think tank”) asserts that this television program is primarily about fatherhood—especially about fathers and sons and their relationships. The priest writes about the program: “Fatherhood in all its manifestations—faithful, failing, fruitful, frustrated—has been a constant theme over [Blue Bloods’] fourteen years.”

*“The father-son paradigm is ageless. It is older than human history. The ‘rays of fatherhood’ contained in this formulation belong to the Trinitarian Mystery of God Himself, which shines forth from Him, illuminating man and his history.”*

To conclude his article, the Fr. de Souza notes that fatherhood is “the oldest story, and therefore, the most real story....” Then he quotes St. John Paul II: “Hegel’s paradigm of the master and the servant is more present in people’s consciousness today than is wisdom, whose origin lies in the filial fear of God.... The only force capable of effectively counteracting this philosophy is found in the Gospel of Christ, in which the paradigm of master-slave is radically transformed into the paradigm of father-son.

*“The father-son paradigm is ageless. It is older than human history. The ‘rays of fatherhood’ contained in this formulation belong to the Trinitarian Mystery of God Himself, which shines forth from Him, illuminating man and his history.”* (Crossing the Threshold of Hope)

“Blue Bloods” teaches its viewers what it means to “think like a father,” in the words of Commissioner Reagan’s father. Unfortunately, fatherhood, in our time and place, has been diminished, minimized, even subjected to scorn. For that reason, true and virtuous

fatherhood is desperately needed today (as always)—for the good of mothers, children, and all of society.

Watch “Blue Bloods” reruns, if you can, with fatherhood in mind. (PTS)♥

## TRUTH AND LOVE

The prior issue of Lifewatch contained the Special Report “Hills to Die On: 15 Reforming Truths for The United Methodist Church” (December 1, 2025). I confess that the document was heavy on doctrine. It was supposed to be. However, because Methodists are Wesleyans, and because Wesleyans are prone to be busy, outreaching, and missional, there was some pushback to “Hills to Die On.” The pushback wanted to make sure that “Hills to Die On” did not erase—from the Church’s life and from the disciple’s walk—the imperative to love God and neighbor. (Little chance of that happening, since the fourteenth hill states that “[t]ruly Christian love is sacrifice for the [actual or authentic] good of the beloved.” [#14, p. 4])

After reading “Hills to Die On,” Mrs. Amy Lunn of Hudson, OH responded with a thoughtful letter. Her letter led to a telephone conversation with the Lifewatch editor. And that conversation resulted in Mrs. Lunn mailing to the editor a poem she had written on the topic of Christian love. Lifewatch readers will benefit, as did the editor, from reading Mrs. Lunn’s poem below.

### LOVE IS SOMETHING YOU DO

*“I love you,” he said as he went out the door  
To attend to his duties that day.  
And I answered, as usual, “I love you more.”  
That word is so easy to say.*

*But just what is love? It’s a feeling for some  
But I’ll tell you something more true.  
Love isn’t a feeling, my friends, you should know  
That love is something you do.*

*We are commanded to love our God  
And to love our neighbor too.  
When the lawyer asked Jesus, “Just who is that?”  
He said, “Love is something you do.”*

*He told of a man left near death on a road  
And a stranger who stopped to give aid.  
He was a neighbor to someone in need  
And he did not ask to be paid.*

*Folks may make you cross, you may not always feel  
The love that’s expected of you.  
Don’t wait for the feeling. Just do as you should  
For love is something you do!*

*God’s Son showed love when He died on the cross.  
He hung there for me and for you.  
He loves us in spite of our failures and faults.  
For love is something you do!*

—Amy Lunn, January 2024

(This poem was written in memory of Howard Mumma, a United Methodist pastor who once served Simpson Church in Canton, OH. He preached a memorable sermon on this topic which I shall never forget. —AL)♥

## YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

● **Thank you for your steady generosity in response to December's fundraising notice.** Your gifts—prayers, messages, and checks—fortify and advance this ministry. Thank you for your support of all kinds! (PTS)

● **Rev. Beth Caulfield certainly has interesting stories to tell.** She wrote People Throw Rocks at Things That Shine: A Clergy Whistleblower's Journey (Vashti Books, 2022) to tell about her clerical journey in United Methodism; needless to say, her experience involves the good, the bad, and the ugly. More recently, Rev. Caulfield, now a Global Methodist minister, helped create the movie "Conceivable" (2024). "Conceivable" is about her mid-life pregnancy, her struggle with choice, and finally her faith-filled welcome of the little stranger. To watch the film, go to [conceivablethemovie.com](http://conceivablethemovie.com), and select one of the available options. The movie is heart-warming and inspiring. It is a must-see movie.

● **Bishop John R. Schol was named and discussed in People Throw Rocks at Things That Shine.** Officially retired in August 2024, he later was called out of retirement to become the Interim Lead Bishop of Nigeria. Most recently, he was appointed interim president of Centenary University (a United-Methodist school in Hackettstown, NJ) for a two-year term. For your information, during the summer of 2025, Centenary offered the world's first doctoral degree in "Happiness Studies." Why not? Its Master of Arts in "Happiness Studies" has been quite popular. (Kristen Volkland, "Bishop Tapped as New President of Centenary," [um-insight.net](http://um-insight.net), November 25, 2025)

Philip Rieff (1922-2006), a sociologist at Penn and a public intellectual for decades, wrote a powerful book entitled The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud (1966). "Happiness Studies" confirms that the therapeutic has truly triumphed in American society. O God of the Bible, have mercy....

● **Cynthia B. Astle, the editor and founder of United Methodist Insight, is pausing her online publication.** You might remember Ms. Astle at the United Methodist Reporter—for fourteen years. Then she moved on to run her online publication. Astle's written word often called the reader to decide—for or against. In a denomination and society where practically everything goes, she provided an important service by pushing readers to decide and/or to act. Let's be clear: Ms. Astle and your editor have many disagreements about basic matters in United Methodism. Even so, her contributions to The

United Methodist Church's public square are missed. I hope her United Methodist Insight returns and causes the rest of us to believe more firmly, think more clearly, speak more thoughtfully, and write more convincingly. Until that time, Cynthia, get some rest. (See Cynthia B. Astle, "United Methodist Insight Goes on Sabbatical," [um-insight.net](http://um-insight.net), December 4, 2025.)

● **"In 2025, the average cost of a first-trimester, surgical abortion rose from \$605 to \$649—the highest cost ever documented, and the largest increase overall (\$44), in the last ten years."** (Sarah Neely/Ricardo Pinedo, "The Average Cost to Kill a Baby in an Abortion in America Is \$649," originally published by Operation Rescue, [LifeNews.com](http://LifeNews.com), December 30, 2025)

Six hundred and forty-nine dollars to destroy and erase a precious gift given by God. It makes no sense.

In the midst of the insanity all around, be steady. Be understanding. Be loving. Be forgiving. Point to God's forgiveness because of Christ's death and resurrection for the world. And yes, confess Christian truth with firmness: This child is created by God, and this child bears the image of God.

● **"A diseased organization cannot reform itself,"** says the mid-twentieth century satirist of business organizations, C. Northcote Parkinson (1909-1993). 'The cure,' he wrote, 'whatever its nature, must come from outside.' The Nicene Creed calls the church to forswear its self-reliance and believe once again in the power of the Holy Spirit.'" (Joseph D. Small, "The Nicene Creed: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow," Theology Matters [Vol. 31, No. 4, Fall 2025], p. 8) In other words, the church cannot reform itself; the Holy Spirit, working with the creed, must do the heavy lifting.

● **Check out these lyrics from "For All the Saints"** (#711, The United Methodist Hymnal). "[T]hou, Lord, their captain in the well fought fight." (v. 2) "O may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold, fight as the saints who nobly fought of old, and win with them the victor's crown of gold." (v. 3) "And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song, and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong." (v. 4) We United Methodists often sing that hymn with gusto. Then we turn and whine that, "We're tired of fighting." Seems that our Lord and His Church, by having us sing "For all the Saints," is trying to get us to be done with fear, to get up off the pew and off the couch, stand up, stand firm, contend for the faith, and fight for the faith.

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03/01/26

\* Richard John Neuhaus speaks:  
**We shall not grow weary**  
\* **Abortion as a moral injury**  
\* **Would Wesley have joined**  
**today's woke establishment?**

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To sing “For all the Saints” and then to say, “I’m tired of fighting,” is what we used to call hypocrisy.

● **An email from the North Carolina Conference’s Media Center arrived here in early January.** It contained a list of 2025’s most-requested resources. As you might expect, Rev. Adam Hamilton’s books and videos dominated the list. Even so, Bishop Willimon made the top ten.

There was a curious wrinkle in this year-end report. Several of the resource’s web pages contained this rather odd phrase: “UMC-endorsed.” (One of them noted: “UMC-endorsed curriculum.”) Several of Rev. Hamilton’s resources earned endorsement. So did Bp. Willimon’s.

Historically, Roman Catholics have used the “imprimatur.” So now, United Methodists have the “UMC-endorsed?”

My question is: In The United Methodist Church

exactly who—or what committee, or board, or agency—is acting as the endorsing authority or agent? If you know, please let me know. I would like to be so informed.

At a time when trust in denominational elites seems lower than ever, for them to run around and affix “UMC-endorsed” on their favored books and videos seems questionable—if not laughable or ridiculous.

● *Vulnerari praesidio.* “Protect the most vulnerable.”

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

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