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# *Evangelical Renewal Fellowship*

# *Newsletter*

## *for New England United Methodists*

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Vol. 1, Issue 3 —June/July/August 2004

The Newsletter of the New England Evangelical Renewal Fellowship of The Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church

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### **WHERE IS THE LINE? Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Bentum**

Where is the line that, when crossed, would compel you to leave The United Methodist Church? I have heard that questioned in various forms over the years since I identified myself as clearly an evangelical my first year in college in 1976. Some have challenged me with that question and I, in turn, have challenged others.

The line varies with each person. I was sent to the churches I currently serve because one of my evangelical brothers decided in October of 2001 that as a pastor that the line had been crossed and so he left taking many lay people with him. We remain friends because I understand what he felt he needed to do and his ministry is flourishing in the independent church he now leads (although he has left me with a tough job!). Now, this June we will say goodbye to another effective evangelical pastor who believes the line has been crossed and he will move on to another denomination. The recent history of our church has seen a continual hemorrhage of committed evangelicals, both clergy and lay, that could no longer stay in the church for one reason or another.

When I decided that it was time to move from twelve wonderful years of ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in 1992 to go back on the ordination track in the UMC, I was challenged by one of my colleagues. He wanted to know why I was willing to serve in a church that was clearly apostate (he was not shy about his feelings!). To me the answer was clear, because I had given it much thought. The Lord had opened a unique door for me to serve and he was calling me to step through it. InterVarsity had taught me to think like a missionary and that is the posture in which I would serve in a sometimes hostile and barren land called the United Methodist Church.

Is there a line that I will not cross? The line for me is that the church as an institution would pass some legislation making it impossible for me to serve with integrity. Currently, no matter how radical the voices are that are out there, the official teaching of the church in doctrine and practice is sound. Some of our leaders may indeed be apostate, but I can serve with integrity as a pastor/missionary. At general conference some of the leaders of the evangelical movement floated a proposal that as a denomination perhaps the line has been crossed and we need to split amicably. This was done out of sheer frustration and weariness that after years of discussion there seems to be little holding us together. Instead of united, in reality we are untied, as the joke goes. In the end unity was affirmed by all parties.

Has the line been crossed for you? Should you stay or leave? I am not going to give you a list of reasons to stay, even though I certainly hate to see this continued hemorrhage of our church. I believe the more important question is whether or not God is calling you to stay. Please don't stay to "save" the church. Saviorhood is a path to burnout and frustration and only one person can claim that position. Please don't stay out of some sentimental feelings for the church. Sentimentality is a shallow foundation to stand on.

Instead, stay simply because that is what God has called you to do. Let the line be whether or not God has called you here to serve in this place and time. Let us not worry about whether we win or lose, or whether the church splits or remains united, but whether or not we have been faithful to the call of God on our lives.

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## SOME THOUGHTS FROM GENERAL CONFERENCE

Rev. Stephen Mott

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My attendance at General Conference was accompanied by frequent prayers, sometimes during crucial votes, that God would save our denomination and would save our church. Those prayers were remarkably answered by God's grace.

At the beginning of the Conference, I asked Jim Heidinger, head of the Good News Movement, what our strategy was in responding to the jury acquittal of the pastor with a same-sex partner in Oregon. The first move, he said, was to get the General Conference to request a review of the trial decision by the Judicial Council of the church. The jury had found that Rev. Dammann was a self-avowed practicing homosexual. They argued, however, that the statement in the Discipline that a ordained minister could not be a self-avowed practicing homosexual did not have the force of law. They claimed that the "since" which introduces it ("since we do not condone the practice of homosexuality") is a reference to the Social Principles, which is not church law. They were supported by the testimony of a leading writer on UMC law, Jack Tuell (whose books on the Discipline I used when I taught UM polity).

The Judicial Council's ruling could not have been stronger for our position, however. It declared that the statement is unambiguous: homosexual practice is not condoned. The practice of homosexuality is a chargeable offense. Such a pastor is not appointable. It appears that the ruling cannot be used retrospectively to apply to the Dammann decision since the church cannot appeal a jury decision. The legislative leader for Good News thinks it does apply and that the bishop in Oregon won't appoint her. Judgment by a jury of peers and the jury not being overturned by the church has a long history in the struggle for freedom of Christians from persecution. During General Conference I was reading John Vicker's biography of Thomas Coke, Wesley's assistant and the first Methodist bishop in America (Coke as in "Cokesbury"). Wesley held that preachers accused of immorality should be judged by their peers—"the preachers in conference." Coke, who had been trained in law, commented in support that it is not equitable for the same persons to be "accusers, jury, judges, and executioners." The only parallel for such "barefaced tyranny and injustice" was in "the histories of the Popish Inquisition."

The General Conference furthermore passed several votes making the present position against homosexual practice all the stronger and making it all the more difficult, along with the Judicial Council decision, for there to be a repeat of the Oregon acquittal. Those who are supporters of covenantal same-sex relationships have given up for the present removing the condemnation of same-sex practice. What they were pressing for again at this General Conference was to replace the Social Principle that condemns it with a statement that the church is "not of one mind" on this issue. That effort was defeated in committee so they brought to the Conference floor a milder statement which adds to the condemnation, the words that "we recognize that some Christians disagree on this matter." The Conference not only rejected that qualification but made the Social Principle even stronger. It removed the "since" ("Since we do not condone the practice of homosexuality) for an even clearer declaration: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers it incompatible with Christian teaching."

The statement in the Discipline regarding ordained ministers not being practicing homosexuals was also made stronger. The "since" was removed so that it is a clear, self-standing declaration. "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve." Another effort to moderate it by letting each Annual Conference determine its own position on homosexuality in relation to fitness to minister was voted down by a two to one margin. There were other significant decisions as those holding to the present position of the church won vote after vote. To the statement on the sanctity of the marriage covenant, which is between a man and a woman, these words were added: "We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman." The organization that organized a demonstration at General Conference for change condemned this decision as a serious break with the support of lesbian and gay equality.

To the list of offenses for which an ordained minister can be charged, explicit language was added: "being a self-avowed practicing homosexual or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual union or perform a same-sex wedding." An amendment to remove from the listing of chargeable offenses "celebrating homosexual unions by our members or in our churches" was defeated 739-172.

Another decision strengthening the position of the church on this matter was changing the formula for representation from the various Jurisdictions on the general agencies of the church. Now the representation will be based more on the number of members in the Jurisdiction. The fastest growing Jurisdictions are the one which are more evangelical. As a result the more liberal Western Jurisdiction lost thirty members and the Southeast Jurisdiction gained thirty-six.

The press made a big issue out of a personal statement of one Evangelical leader that we may have come to an impasse in which there should be a division of the church. He made it clear that he was speaking for himself. On the closing day, in view of the report of that schism, 96 percent of the delegates voted in support of a motion written by a pastor who is a former student of mine, declaring our unity in mission. One matter of significance lies in this thought of division. When that time comes when many feel that division is needed, then that separation should be done in union with others so that the institutions, heritage, and other resources of the denomination continue even if then in two separate parts. The expectation is that Evangelicals should not fragment in isolated acts of separation.

That day may never come. The response in this General Conference to prayer illustrates what Chang Son said about Evangelicals being in the majority, not by numbers, but by the power of the Spirit. Leaven is used in the Bible both positively and negatively. Thomas Coke commented on how the godly Moravians looked upon themselves as a leaven within the churches. One speaker at General Conference shared about a Bosnia refugee who was asked how he could hope when there was no hope. His answer was, "God." This General Conference shows that we have both hope and God.

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## **MORE THOUGHTS FROM GENERAL CONFERENCE**

**Henry Dunn**

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My thoughts are many about General Conference. They are also varied. It is interesting to find at General Conference that those who describe themselves as one or more of the following: Evangelical, Conservative, Traditional, Trinitarian, Orthodox, etc. ...are clearly in the majority. The votes clearly pointed out the theological character of the General Conference and the UMC as a whole.

In the midst of unpleasantness and acrimony, there were moments of redemption; moments where we voted to support peace initiatives that we could all get behind; moments where we voted for funding to fight AIDS in Africa and across the Globe; moments where people of good faith spoke to each other in civility and understanding; and moments where we acknowledged our dependence on a very big God. The moment of greatest redemption for me came during the election of the Judicial Council, our highest Church Court. In the midst of everyone counting how many Conservatives and how many Liberals were getting elected to the Council to see what the likely theological bent would be, I sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit moving in a very palpable way. It was as if God was saying to me that He is in His Church and God has not abandoned us. He will lead us to where He wants us to go.

The vote for unity at the end of Conference may have been only a "band aid" to cover over a very deep wound. It may also have been a vote that was a referendum on what our goals should be...being united for real ...loving a big God, reconciled to God through The Son and guided by his Holy Spirit. In that process of becoming united, as we continue to contend for the faith, we and others will be better for it. It may be hard at times, but I am coming to sense what the Scripture says about his "burden is light" as I begin to more fully trust in our very big God.

So what's next? My hope is that all in New England who are friends of the ERF or Confessing Movement will know that God is still in His Church. With that said, our actions need to continue to be driven by prayer (as Tom Bentum has called us to be a people of prayer). As we pray and listen to the Holy Spirit, there may be times that we need to stand up to contend for the Faith, as we understand it, which may look political. We should no longer be afraid of this. However, we must continue to focus on personal spiritual renewal, both one person at a time and how renewal can take hold in New England. We need to "stay on message" and talk about what God has done in our lives with folks who desperately need to be connected with their God!

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## SALVATION IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

Walter Ciesluk

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### **Personal Experience:**

What do we have to do to be saved? This question which should be of great import to everyone is especially so to me. For you see I was brought up in a time when the Protestants and Roman Catholics who were predominant in my community argued about who's religion was the true Christian religion and who would be saved. The Roman Catholic position in those days was made very clear to me in church and catechism. There was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic church. So when I married a nice young United Methodist girl in her church, a lot of people were under the impression that my eternal destiny was going to be Hell. At the time, I argued in my mind that that they couldn't be right and I decided to take the risk that it wasn't God's answer either. But, over the years, I have made it the principle goal of my theological investigations and inquiries to learn of God's plan for salvation.

### **The Bible's Answer:**

It took a long time, but I finally became convinced, that God didn't care whether one was a Roman Catholic, United Methodist, or any other stripe of Christian. The key to salvation is first recognizing that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead to demonstrate His power and authority, and that He promises eternal life to whoever believes and makes a commitment to follow Him with the help of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is a gift of God to whoever makes this act of faith. This is simply the good news of the Gospel message. In the "Contagious Christian" personal evangelism course (Ref. 1) which I lead periodically, we learn to communicate this gospel message simply and effectively to our friends and others. To make it easier to understand, the authors of this course have organized the message into four major points: GOD, US, CHRIST, and YOU and I.

**GOD.** There are three qualities we need to know about God. The first quality is that: God is loving. In John 4:16b it says ...God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. The second quality is that God is holy. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says: But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Anything impure stands in stark contrast to God, since He is without sin or impurity of any kind. And thirdly, God is just. His holiness must expose and reject anything impure or sinful, His justice must punish rebellion, sin, and imperfection.

**US.** We were created good, but became sinful. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). All of us continue to rebel against God and break His laws. As good as we may think we are, we all fall far short of God's perfect standards. As a consequence, we are all condemned to physical and spiritual death, and separation from God for all eternity. There is no way to escape this consequence without being reconciled to God. This is where the good news of the gospel fits in. It refers to what Christ did for us.

**CHRIST.** Christ is the one who provides the opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation between the Loving Father and Us, sinners. The good news of the gospel is that Christ died as our substitute. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24). The debt of death that we owe was paid for by Christ who died in our place. His righteousness, forgiveness, and life in exchange for our sins, guilt, and death. Finally, Christ offers His forgiveness as a gift. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

**YOU and I.** To receive this gift, you and I must respond. It is not enough to hear the gospel, simply understand it, or even intellectually agree with it. You and I must ask Christ to be our forgiver and leader. 1 John 1:9 says: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. And 1 Peter 3:15 says: But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. This explains how we need to respond. As "forgiver," Christ takes away our death sentence and gives us eternal life with Him. As our "leader," Christ has control of our life. It is important for people to understand that they are coming to Him not only for forgiveness of past sins, but also for the strength and guidance they will need to make a fresh start and to begin living the way God wants them to live. When we respond by receiving Christ as forgiver and leader, a spiritual transformation takes place in us. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives and changes us so that we begin to desire to follow Christ.

## **What About the World Religions?**

So where does this leave the vast numbers of people, many who live among us, who profess religions and faiths other than faith in Jesus Christ? What about the eternal destiny of the millions who have never heard of Jesus? Will God extend an opportunity for salvation to them? Is it necessary for non-Christians to call explicitly upon the name of Jesus in order to benefit from his work on their behalf?

Religious pluralism is one of the greatest challenges facing Christianity in today's Western culture. The belief that Christ is the only way to God is being challenged, and increasingly Christianity is seen as just one among many valid paths to God. On this question, Christian theologians typically have divided themselves among three positions, termed pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism (Ref. 2). Pluralism is the position that there are many saviors, and Jesus is just one of them. Exclusivists contend that Jesus is the only savior and explicit confession of this is necessary before one dies. Inclusivists maintain that while Christ is the only way to the Father, explicit knowledge of Him is not. For instance "Good" Buddhists can be saved by Jesus if they recognize their inability to save themselves and cry out for mercy. Inclusivists say they are casting themselves unwittingly upon Christ, who is God's mercy.

Certain theologians who espouse pluralism have to make enormous doctrinal concessions. They typically think that: "Christ cannot be sole mediator between God and humanity, not because he did not claim it, not because the church has not confessed it, but because, in the present cultural mood, such a belief in Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners is not fair or equal treatment. I believe that people who hold such a position can not truly call themselves Christian. Most evangelical Christians today profess exclusivism, or that the only possibility for encountering God and receiving salvation is to exercise explicit faith in Jesus Christ in this earthly life. On the other hand, it appears that the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant mainline, and a growing number of evangelicals have adopted a more inclusivism attitude toward God's saving purposes (Ref 3). They argue that if God really loves the whole world and desires everyone to be saved, than everyone must have access to salvation. If Christ died for all, while yet sinners, the opportunity must be given for all to register a decision about what was done for them. According to the Bible, people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology. Since God has not left anyone without witness, people are judged on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded to that light. Scripture and reason both imply that no one can be held responsible for truth of which they were ignorant; they are judged on the basis of the truth they know. To summarize their argument, "Those who will suffer everlasting destruction will not be the unevangelized but those who neither obey the Gospel nor any other form of revelation they have been given."

## **The Christian Response:**

So what is an appropriate Christian response given this current situation with respect to religious pluralism and the various theological stances? I have to admit that the arguments for a Christian attitude of inclusivism are interesting and attractive. But, we also have to admit that these new ideas about possible salvation outside of Christianity are theological speculation at best, and if we embrace them we do so at our peril. There will be grave and eternal consequences if we promulgate them as part of a watered down gospel and they turn out to be wrong. The only response then is to continue to preach the whole gospel in a loving but unapologetic way to all nations and in all times as we have been commanded by Jesus Christ Himself. There will be no consequence if we preach the whole gospel as spelled out in the New Testament, even if, God has provided some other "unknown to us" paths to reconcile people to Himself.

As the lay leader for evangelism in my church, I have been striving to read just about everything I can find on how churches and pastors, known for outreach to the un-churched and non Christians, approach evangelism. One such book *"Fearless Faith, Living Beyond the Walls of "Safe" Christianity (Ref. 4)* includes a chapter 15 entitled, Evangelism 101, which presents a philosophy of evangelism appropriate for our pluralistic world. I thought it might be valuable to try to highlight and share with you some of the author's thoughts on this vital Christian ministry.

- People's response to the gospel and our sharing of the gospel are not necessarily related. People can't believe without hearing, but they can't hear unless God opens their ears. Preaching only guarantees He has a chance to do that; it doesn't guarantee He will.
- The word "witness" in the New Testament is almost always used as a noun. A witness is someone who has seen something and tells what he or she saw when called upon. As long as our story is relating the current

ways in which we are experiencing God's grace, forgiveness, and power--our witness will be as effective as it needs to be.

- Sharing our faith should involve an invitation from non-Christians to us. Such an invitation to share our life can come only, after we have given someone our attention and respect. Peter puts it this way: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Peter is talking about the unbeliever's invitation to answer a question. An invitation to explain a hope. An invitation to give reasons for what we believe. These invitations are cultivated by friendships with our non-Christian neighbors, but this rarely happens unless someone feels safe around us, regardless of what they believe. "Gentleness" means, I will not lose patience over your continual rejection of Christians or the gospel. I am not responsible for your salvation, only for telling you, when you ask me, what I have experienced, so far, of Jesus Christ in my life." Likewise, "respect" says, "You can be safe around me. I respect your right to believe whatever you want. It is not my goal to get you to agree with me. I respect your right to disagree. I respect your right to your own spiritual journey."
- Many Christians operate under the belief that before we can get a person to believe in Christ, we have to get them to disbelieve everything else. But, there is some truth to be found in whatever a non-Christian is currently believing. When Paul spoke to the pagan worshipers and Greek philosophers in Athens, he started by commending them for being very religious people (Acts 17: 16-34). We Christians should feel confident to profess that "Jesus is the only way, but that there's more than one way to Jesus." Could someone get to Jesus by way of prostitution? by way of Buddha? by way of drugs? by way of murder? by way of Islam? I am sure we all have heard of people who have traveled all these roads, and roads even more bizarre than these, to get to Christ. God clearly wasn't absent from their lives before their conversion.
- We need to stop being threatened by other people's paths to Jesus. Some paths may be more direct, but almost any path will do if someone is earnestly seeking God. The Scriptures are very clear that if someone is seeking God with his whole heart, he will find him. The Scriptures also tell us that the only way to God is by way of Jesus, who is the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6). That means, then, that if people are earnestly seeking God, no matter where they begin, they will ultimately end up with Jesus. We don't have to invalidate an unbeliever's path and start them off all over again in another direction. We point them toward the next step.
- The real tragedy is that there are many Christians who do not even relate to unbelievers unless they absolutely have to. We don't need to witness more, we need to relate more with non-Christians so that our witness will mean more. If our witness truly is more who we are than what we do, then we need to be in places where who we are makes a difference. Spending most of our time with believers may be desirable for us, perhaps, for our safety and comfort, but not for the gospel.
- At the end of Christ's ministry on earth, he sent his disciples out as witnesses in the world. "You will be my witnesses" is not a command. It is a statement of fact. If there is any command implied in this statement it is a command to spread out where their lives would have an effect. "Stay here in Jerusalem until you receive my Spirit," Jesus was saying, "then disperse yourselves all over the world where your lives, your faith, and your witness will make a difference."

#### References:

1. Mark Mittenberg, Lee Strobel, Bill Hybels, Becoming a Contagious Christian, Zondervan, Copyright 1995
2. Gerald R. McDermott, Jesus and the Religions, A New Paradigm for Christian Engagement?, Christianity Today, Copyright 2004, [www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2004/001/4.09.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2004/001/4.09.html)
3. Clark H. Pinnock, A Wideness of God's Mercy, The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions, ZondervanPublishingHouse, Copyright 1992
4. John Fischer, Fearless Faith, Living Beyond the Walls of "Safe" Christianity, Harvest House Publishers, Copyright 2002

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## ONE GOD – FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

Deborah Botham

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“Bring me a man that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the triune God.” -- John Wesley

I will state without reservation that I cannot comprehend the concept of the Trinity. Contemplating the vastness of God sends my mind into a tailspin. I am left speechless, and, quite frankly, thought-less. What remains is a sense of awe and wonder, love and gratitude, and a heart full of praise.

But I do take quite seriously the charge that all Christians must be ready to “defend the faith,” and when I was given the task of writing this article, I found myself stymied and unable to articulate why I am so certain that our great God is indeed a Triune God. This is a doctrine I have never questioned, but why? It is certainly one of the most difficult to understand and is never explicitly stated in Scripture. Evidence of the plurality of God is, however, implicit throughout the Bible, beginning with the very first verse.

“In the beginning, GOD ...” The Hebrew word Elohim, God, is plural.<sup>1</sup> Just 25 verses later, this plurality is affirmed as God states, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” (Gen. 1:26a). Who is us? God and angels, as some would have it? No! Present with God at the Creation was Jesus Christ, “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:3)

The Holy Spirit is also present, as stated in Genesis 1:2, “And now, as far as the earth was concerned, it was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was hovering upon the face of the waters.” Present at creation, in existence before creation, was God, one being or essence, three separate yet equal (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).

The equality of the three is key and unique to Christianity, and the Bible is full of unequivocal statements: The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Paul wrote in Phil. 1:2, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In Colossians 2:9 he explained, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” And as Luke recounted the deception of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:3,4, he wrote “Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit... you have not lied to men but to God.” Again, three distinct persons are defined, but all exist in one God: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut. 6:4).

As Christians, it is our duty not only to believe the Word of God, trust its teachings and obey its commands. A.W. Tozer wrote, “It is impossible to keep our moral practices sound and our inward attitudes right while our idea of God is erroneous or inadequate. If we would bring back spiritual power to our lives, we must begin to think of God more nearly as He is.”<sup>2</sup> God *is* triune, and that trinity is essential for salvation.

The Father, in His incomprehensible, all-encompassing love for each of us, sent Christ His only Son, without sin, to take on all of our corruption and ugliness so that we might come into the Father’s presence cloaked in Christ’s righteousness. We are made aware of our unworthiness only through the guidance and conviction of the Holy Spirit. Remove any one of those parts, and we are lost.

Attacks on the Trinity come from all fronts; the doctrine has been called incoherent and contradictory. Selected use of Biblical texts are misinterpreted or twisted, and one of the most misunderstand is that referring to Jesus as the “only begotten Son of God.” (John 1:18) To some, “begetting” is equated with creating. “Only begotten” does not refer to any physical generation but to a special relationship between the Son and the Father ... Just as an earthly father and

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<sup>1</sup> D. James Kennedy. **Understanding the Trinity: Evidence for God in Three Persons.** Ft. Lauderdale: Coral Ridge Ministries, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Tozer, **The Knowledge of the Holy.** San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961.

son have a special filial relationship, so the eternal Father and His eternal Son are uniquely and intimately working on concert with one another. It does not refer to physical generation but to an eternal procession from the Father.”<sup>3</sup>

Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons see the Scriptures as polytheistic - presenting three separate gods. But God clearly states “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6).

Another commonly raised objection is that Jesus cannot be God because He took on human limitations. This complaint does not consider that Jesus had two natures: divine and human. “As a man, Jesus cooperated with the limitations of His humanity, was made lower than the angels (Heb. 2:9), talking about position, and under the Law (Gal. 4:4), signifying Him being under legal obligations... But these do not negate that Jesus was divine since they reference His humanity and not His divinity.”<sup>4</sup> It was Jesus Himself who said, “Before Abraham was, I AM”. (John 8:58)

Objections to the Trinity outside of Christianity are to be expected. But what about omissions from within? Teachings on the Holy Spirit are noticeably absent from many congregations. And it is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who was sent by Jesus Christ when He ascended to the Father. He is “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17) sent in Christ’s name (John 14:26).

What if there were no Holy Spirit in the world? Our efforts to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19) would be hopelessly muddled with the interjection of our humanity and fallibility. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, has been sent to “teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26). Who is holy but God? And the Holy Spirit speaks only what He hears – there is no error in His teaching and guidance.

We cannot prove the truth of Christianity on our own. Neither can we prove the truth of the Trinity using only human knowledge. We look to the Scriptures and to the natural revelation that God has given us in His Creation. Dr. Kennedy’s pamphlet referenced below has an elegant explanation of this revelation, using the creation as a reflection of the Creator.

Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Trinity lands squarely outside the bounds of man’s ability to reason. Biblical evidence supports it, and we are called to believe it on faith. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than you ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

One doesn’t need an understanding of the Trinity before he or she can receive the salvation of God through Jesus Christ. But once an individual is saved, he must diligently strive to know the God whose grace has made that new life possible. We must know ALL of God, not just the part that is comfortable, easy to accept or understand. “This we must do with bowed heads and reverent hearts, for the ground on which we stand is holy. The subject is transcendently sacred; it is the infinitely righteous and majestic God.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Norman Geisler. **The Trinity – Part Three.**

<sup>4</sup> **The Trinity, the Hypostatic Union, and the Communicatio Idiomatum.** www.carm.org.

<sup>5</sup> A.A. Hodge, quoted in Kennedy.

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## FUTURE EVENTS

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- ***ERF luncheon meeting during Annual Conference will be on Thursday, June 10, 2004 at noon in the President's Dining Room. Please join us and bring someone who might be interested in finding out more about ERF.***
- ***The ERF executive team meeting will be on September 2, 2004 from 10am to 3pm at Exeter UMC in Exeter, NH.***
- ***The next ERF conference will be March 11 and 12, 2005. The feature theme and speaker will be: New Life for Dying Churches! It Can Happen Anywhere!, Dr. Rose Sims.***

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## RECENT BOOKS ON TRENDS IN CHRISTIANITY

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### **Being The Body, Charles Colson, Evelyn Vaughn, W Publishing Group, March 2003**

Charles Colson has been called, "one of the most important social reformers in a generation." Ten years ago in his book, "The Body", Colson turned his prophetic attention to the church and how it might break out of its cultural captivity and reassert its biblical identity. "The Body" issued a wake-up call to the Church. In his new book, "Being the Body", he revisits the tough issues he addressed in that previous work to determine how far the Church has come in the last decade.

Today the original book's classic truths have not changed. But the world we live in has. Christians in America have had their complacency shattered and their beliefs challenged. Around the world, the clash of world views has never been more strident. Before all of us, daily, are the realities of life and death, terror and hope, light and darkness, brokenness and healing. Colson pleads that "We cannot withdraw to the comfort of our sanctuaries... we must engage. For, if ever there was a time for Christians to be the Body of Christ in the world, it is now."

In this new, revised and expanded edition of The Body, Charles Colson revisits the question, "What is the church and what is its relevance to contemporary culture at large?" Being the Body is provocative, insightful, and inspires us to rise above a "Jesus and me" faith to a nobler view of something bigger and grander than ourselves --the glorious, holy vision for which God created the church.

The book draws upon politics, philosophy and religion, demonstrating Colson's trademark breadth in its quest to foster Christian community.

### **Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics, R.C. Sproul, Crossway Books, September 2003**

There is a widespread belief that reason and faith are incompatible and opposed to each other. Faith is viewed as subjective, emotional, a crutch for those who find the real world too hard. Though many of the world's finest minds hold this view, the Bible teaches that it is the fool who says there is no God. Dr. R. C. Sproul clearly and simply argues that at its core Christianity is rational. He focuses on defending the basic truth claims for two of the most crucial issues of apologetics: God's existence

and the Bible's authority. In this book, Dr. Sproul affirms four logical principles that are necessary for all real discussion and teaches you how to defend your faith in a faithless world. Using the writings of church fathers and philosophers throughout the ages, he presents the common ideologies that work against faith. He urges that, "the defense of the faith is not a luxury or an intellectual vanity. It is a task appointed by God that you should be able to give a reason for the hope that is in you as you bear witness before the world."

### **Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?: Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World, James Montgomery Boice, Crossway Books, February 2001**

Anyone who honestly evaluates the church's life and outlook will probably conclude that these are not good days. The evangelical churches have achieved success, but in a worldly way--big numbers, big budgets, and big outreaches. Yet church attendance is actually down and alleged "born again" believers do not differ significantly in their worldview from their neighbors. Why? Pastor James Montgomery Boice suggests that we have forgotten our theology and, instead are pursuing, accepting and utilizing the wisdom of the world.

Rev. Boice believes that our ignorance of God and neglect of the gospel of grace is the root of the problem. In this book, he identifies what's happening within the church and explains how the five doctrinal truths that transformed the world during the Reformation not only offer the solution but can shape a renewal today. He urges that, "if the church starts again offering people what they desperately lack--the Word of God and salvation through Christ--rather than giving them an imitation of what they already have, Christianity will thrive once again. And in holding fervently to the foundational truths of the gospel, our churches will know and experience the power of spiritual renewal."

In this book, Rev. Boice affirms that, "Without these five confessional statements--Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and glory to God alone--we do not have a true church, and clearly not one that will survive for very long. For how can any church be a true and faithful church if it does not stand for Scripture alone, is not committed to a biblical gospel, and does not exist for God's glory? A church without these convictions has ceased to be a true church, whatever else it may be.

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### **Purpose Statement**

*Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord, the Confessing Movement exists to enable the United Methodist Church to retrieve its classical doctrinal identity, and to live it out as disciples of Jesus Christ*

### **ERF Executive Team**

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