
RENEWAL



The Journal of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship in New England

Walter Ciesluk, Editor

December/January/February 2007

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

A NEED FOR A SEXUAL ETHIC

Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Bentum

I had not been serving as a pastor very long before 1 Corinthians 6.12-20 came up in the Lectionary as a possible text to preach on. It is one of those few “embarrassing” texts that slipped by the editors of the Lectionary. I had not preached directly on sexuality from the pulpit since I had been there and I thought that this was my opportunity to let folks know what the Bible teaches. Since this text deals with sex outside of marriage as an example of not glorifying God in your body (which is the main point), and sex outside of marriage is major problem in our society, I decided to address it frankly.

Unfortunately as I looked out on the congregation that morning I noticed a new young couple sitting in the congregation. They were the young couple I had just met with the previous Saturday to begin pre-marital counseling. They were un-churched and, like almost all the couples I have met with to prepare for marriage, they were already living together. They liked me and wanted to come and hear me preach. Now I was about to condemn from the pulpit on their first Sunday in church the lifestyle they had chosen! If there ever was a sermon I did not want to preach, that was it. I decided to go ahead, although not with the power and conviction with which I had originally hoped to deliver it.

The good news is that couple actually came back again and many more times. I even got to baptize them as adults and bring them into the church as members. I never dared to ask them what they thought of that first sermon!

One of the roots of my fear and trembling about preaching a clear sermon on a sexual topic was the feeling of isolation. I wondered as I prepared and preached the sermon if my congregation would stand with me on this teaching or was I alone in this matter? The answer of course is that in this fairly typical United Methodist congregation a few were probably with me, but most were probably not. It was another example of our culture steering the ethic of our church.

But more importantly would the church as a whole stand with me as I preached and taught? The answer to that is officially “yes” but practically, “no”. Before sitting down to write my article I reread the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church concerning sexuality. Besides wishing some of the language was stronger in places, I could wholeheartedly agree with the intent if not the letter of the principles. Officially, as I preached that sermon to my congregation on the harm of sex before marriage with that young couple present, my church was indeed standing with me. Practically, the leadership of our church is of a divided mind particularly concerning sexuality. If that were not true, ERF would not have to exist and call the church back to what we have agreed on in our Book of Discipline.

It seems odd to say, as I have titled this article, that we need a sexual ethic, a body of teaching that guides our teaching and behavior. We certainly do not need one in print, we already have that. What we need is an ethic that we actually own or agree on practically. Without it we are clearly just letting the world’s standards fill the void that we have created by our divided mind.

A biblical sexual ethic is freeing. When I worked in campus ministry with college students our sexual ethic was pretty clear and simple: sex outside of marriage is wrong and harmful and marriage is for one man and one woman. That was a high standard for students on secular campuses but it gave the students tremendous freedom both in living with one another on a day-to-day basis and in thinking through together the implications. It was freeing for the campus staff because we all were committed to this ethic and it gave us a foundation on which to guide our students and our lives. That practical commitment together gave us strength to do ministry. There is no freedom in chaos, especially sexual chaos.

A biblical sexual ethic is also healing. This is a basic Christian understanding. Healing comes when we know the truth about ourselves, repent of our sin and turn to God and open ourselves to his healing power. You do not have to look far to see the tremendous damage done in people's lives because of sexual sin. Our lack of clarity and commitment to a sexual ethic only furthers the damage to people's lives and hinders the healing that is so badly needed.

As evangelicals we need to lead the way in our churches to restore a shared sexual ethic so that people can experience freedom and healing. We need to uphold the biblical teaching and the standards that we already have agreed to in print in our Discipline. We can not let the world continue to set our agenda for us as a church. The challenge is just how to do that in a church that in practice is not genuinely with us.

PRAYER – A NECESSARY PART OF OUR DAILY LIVES

Robbin R. Grill

One of my daily morning devotions is “God’s Daily Promise.” At the end of October there was a message that has stuck with me and I would like to share portions of it with you. “Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.” *Psalms 127:1 NLT*

We all remember Benjamin Franklin and his wonderful inventions like the lightning rod. He also had many sayings which are with us even today like “early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” But he was also a key figure when the thirteen colonies were giving birth to a new nation.

At the age of 81, Franklin was the oldest representative at the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. The convention had been going on for weeks and the representatives were still haggling about the relative voting power of large states and small states. Then Franklin stood up and said:

“In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. Have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance? I have lived a long time and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men. We have been assured, sir, ‘that except the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it’ and without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel.”

Fortunately, Benjamin Franklin’s word had their effect, the words from Psalm 127 had their effect, and a compromise was soon worked out. A Constitution was ratified by the states the following year.

Do we sometimes forget that we must pray always, constantly and for everything? I want to express my heartfelt thanks to those few who joined us in prayer just prior to the opening of the Special Session of Conference. God does answer prayer – but we need to pray!

Please keep the prayer requests coming. You can reach me at robbin@rrgcpa.com or at randagrill@hotmail.com. You can also call during the day at (603) 228-0695 or in the evening at (603) 796-2661. Let the prayer team join with you in your prayers. A blessed Christmas to each of you. Let us remember NOT to take the Christ out of Christmas. After all, Jesus IS the reason for the season. God bless you all!

DOCTRINE AND UNITY OF THE CHURCH

David Mills

Many perfectly serious Christians hate, just hate, to be thought of as "dogmatic." You know the sort of people I mean. They end a discussion of first principles by earnestly reassuring everyone of their deep respect for all those who disagree with them, with an eagerness that suggests not so much a respect for differences as a fear that others may think them too sure of their position.

I have heard some very conservative Christians end such a discussion, of first principles, mind you, by declaring that all views on the subject are of equal value and then looking around with the perky smile of someone who expects to be praised.

It is the specifically Christian doctrines that upset this sort of Christian. Such Christians are themselves very dogmatic people on many other matters: they believe that eating ground glass is stupid, that you should not run in front of moving trucks, and that hitting babies is wicked.

But for some reason they do not like to say in public anything exclusively Christian. They like their doctrines "filed by title," with the content left unspecified. They like to talk about the incarnation, but are less comfortable saying "he was made man," because that implies "he, and no other, was made man" and "he, and not Allah, or Buddha, or any of the Hindu pantheon, was made man." These expressions imply "I, though an unworthy sinner, know the truth, and you don't."

When they explain their objection to doctrine, they usually insist that a concern with right doctrine destroys both the unity of the church and her ability to serve the world. They will point to the obvious faith of other Christians and say they do not want to be parted from the others by a mere difference of a few words, and they will declare that the world's needs are far too great to spend time disputing a few abstract concepts.

The same attitude is seen among mainline Christians' ritual appeals to "unity in diversity and diversity in unity," "dialogue," and "koinonia." In its mildest forms, it is seen in the pained look that crosses a mainline Christian's face when someone is so ill-mannered as to suggest that something might be true, even if he is careful not to add that something else is therefore wrong.

Divisive doctrine

When I use the word *doctrine*, I mean a statement about reality, natural and supernatural, a description of what one believes to be true, not what one feels or suspects or intuits or hopes or wishes. Doctrine explains how the world began, why it is the way it is now, and where it is going. By *dogmatic*, I mean a type of conviction that the Christian holds with certainty, but the world takes for arrogance.

The Christian doctrines are both elaborate and specific, even in the short form of the Nicene Creed. The Christian doctrine is not just "Jesus is God's Son," but that he is "one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father" and so on. This statement about reality is both complex and detailed.

These doctrines are so elaborate because they express in propositions the truths of God's revelation, which comes to us first in a person and then in a very long book, understood and articulated by many very learned, wise, and holy men who had to answer some very dangerous errors so precisely that no one could make that mistake again, even by accident.

They are so specific because God acted through specific people and events. He did not send fallen man a philosophy of life; he sent his only Son. And he did not send his Son as a spirit who spoke from the clouds, but made him incarnate of the Virgin Mary. And this God-man did not teach people for a few years and then disappear; he suffered, died, was buried, and rose again on the third day. The doctrines are specific because the reality is specific.

Because Christian doctrine is both so elaborate and specific, modern American Christians tend to feel the whole collection is a bit overdone or academic or of interest only to people who care about that sort of thing. They mean well;

they love Jesus, but they simply do not see why they should worry about doctrine. It looks irrelevant. True religion can't be that complicated.

Doctrine is for sinners

Were we perfect, we would not need doctrine. Though I think even the perfect might well write creeds just for the joy of putting into words what they know about their God.

We are fallen creatures and are therefore far more likely to err than to get things right. We need doctrine, and yet it does not seem to do us much good. It seems pointless at best and pernicious at worst. Doctrinal differences have broken friendships, destroyed families, divided churches, and even brought nations to war. A concern for doctrinal precision and the inevitable squabbles seems to be a luxury the church cannot afford.

Most people today feel as if this view of doctrine ought to be true, but it isn't. The church neither can be unified nor can it witness effectively to the world without a common doctrine. Doctrine is another name for reality, and churches will stay together and act effectively only if they live according to right doctrine, for otherwise reality will eventually destroy them.

If Christians are to be one body in any meaningful sense, and if they are to get anything useful done, they have to be dogmatic. To stop worrying about right doctrine is a luxury the church cannot afford.

The Unity of the Church

First, the church needs doctrine to ensure its unity. Almost all the Western churches are deeply divided on fundamental questions, and those responsible for keeping them alive usually propose four alternative sources of unity: a common ethical standard, a common religious experience, a common ecclesiastical process, and a common institution. None, however, can create unity when the members disagree on doctrine. The mainline churches have all tried the four alternatives in the last three decades, to no avail.

1. A Common Ethical Standard-The first alternative that mainline Christians usually propose is a *common ethical standard*. It is thought that however much people differ from one another in doctrine, they all recognize the same moral laws. If they disagree about the resurrection, they will nevertheless agree that murder and adultery and selling nuclear weapons to developing nations are wrong.

A common ethical standard cannot produce unity because a common ethical standard requires a common doctrine. People act in certain ways because they believe certain things to be true. If they did not believe these things, they would act differently.

In mainline churches, different doctrines have already led to irreconcilable ethical standards. Those who accept St. Paul's teaching believe sex outside marriage is sinful; those who don't accept his teaching, don't. Those who believe that everyone is created in the image of God oppose abortion on demand; those who believe in the ultimate importance of individual choice support it. Those who believe creation reveals God's will believe homosexuality a perversion; those who believe creation less significant than "God's inclusive love" believe it an honorable life. Without a common doctrine, there is no common ethical standard and no unity.

2. A Common Experience-The second candidate usually invoked to replace doctrine is a *common religious experience*. All people, it is thought, have some sense of the divine, some feeling for the "wholly other" or some "ultimate concern," though they express it in the forms of their culture and experience. Traditional doctrines are only inherited expressions of this sense, more or less helpful and relevant.

A common religious experience cannot produce unity because we cannot define "religious experience" in any usefully limited way-after all, people have sincerely claimed divine guidance to torture babies. "Experience" is not a specific enough experience to appeal to. To be able to say that one person has experienced God but another (the baby-torturer, for example) has not, requires a doctrine, which defeats the purpose of appealing to experience in the first place.

More importantly, on the testimony of religious people themselves, they do not experience the same divinity. People who know and follow their religion are usually more convinced of its unique truth, not less. The cultural forms and inherited doctrines of each are different because a different god is worshiped in each.

The proponents of common religious experience respond by claiming to understand peoples' experience better than the people themselves or by making some implausible claims—for example, that Christianity, which asserts that God became a specific man who was raised bodily from the dead to make men and women sons and daughters of God, is really the same as Buddhism, which looks forward to the extinction of the self.

The diversity of religious experiences in mainline churches suggests that different gods are being worshiped. Some members experience God only in Jesus; others experience him or her or (I suppose) "it" in the deities of pagan religions or in the depths of their own psyches or even (this has been proposed by a tenured professor of theology at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge) in passionate and varied sexual episodes. Some experience God as the transcendent Father, others as the immanent Mother. Without a common doctrine, there is no common religious experience, and no unity.

3. A Common Process—The third alternative, increasingly invoked as the first two fail, is a *common process*, particularly of "dialogue" and (the new, improved version of dialogue) "conversation." Unity, it is thought, is not to be found in our answers, but in our questions, in opening ourselves to each other's unique insights, in coming to know each other better and in affirming each other's experiences and beliefs. Just talking to each other will by itself heal our divisions.

This alternative also fails. A common process cannot produce unity, because dialogue, if it is sincere, must eventually discuss the members' basic beliefs. About the fundamentals, people either will agree or disagree. Dialogue cannot heal division where the source of division is a doctrinal difference neither side can give up.

In the mainline churches the process of dialogue has only delayed the official recognition of fundamental differences. Their members may possibly respect each other more (though possibly not), but respect is not unity. Two men fighting a duel may respect each other greatly, but they are still trying to kill each other. When a process of dialogue has come to some conclusion in an ecclesial legislative body, it has only shown how profoundly divided they are.

Some people believe that the experiences of homosexual people do not change the scriptural judgment of homosexual acts; others believe that the experiences are more revealing than Scripture. Once these differences are clarified, there really isn't much more to be said. Without a common doctrine, dialogue can only lead to disagreement and division, but not to unity.

4. A Common Institution or Heritage—The fourth alternative to doctrine as a source of unity, invoked when even the third has failed, is a *common institution*. Unity in doctrine, ethical standards, religious experiences, and institutional process is seen to be impossible, but it is thought that those who hold irreconcilable doctrines can be held together by shared allegiance to the church or its tradition or ethnic heritage. Hope is held out that doctrinal opponents might someday agree if only they put the unity of the institution ahead of their doctrine.

Anglicanism, for example, is said to be comprehensive or inclusive (defined as doctrinally agnostic, which, as a matter of historical fact, is simply untrue). Its mission is to prove that people of profoundly divergent beliefs can live together in harmony. Doctrinal ambiguity is said to be of the "genius of Anglicanism," which would have surprised the Reformers who died at the stake for their doctrinal clarity and sent others thereto for theirs.

Institutional unity is, admittedly, unity of a sort. It means that no matter what is preached each Sunday from the pulpit of the various churches, they will all have the same name on the sign outside, and their members share the same newspapers, seminaries, and pension fund. But this kind of unity simply draws the largest possible boundary to include everyone it wants to include, and true and useful unity is more than the agreement to go about under the same name.

No institution with a mission can afford such radical diversity or such a depleted definition of itself. John Ashcroft and Hillary Clinton could both join the same club, but not the same political party. A chess club could include those who believe Scripture eternally authoritative and those who believe it must be revised to satisfy new demands, but a church cannot.

Without a common doctrine, an institution is merely a marriage of convenience, one that will almost certainly lead to divorce. Actually, as the liberals now in power lose tolerance for those who hold to the traditional, received view of sex and orders, the marriage of convenience is just as likely to lead to chaos, because one partner does not want to divide the estate and would like to keep it all for himself.

The alternatives to doctrine as a source of unity are unable to hold together the people of a church. Without a common doctrine, a common ethics simply does not exist; a common experience produces behaviors too diverse to call unity; a common process leads to disagreement and division, if it leads anywhere; and a common institution is not unified in any meaningful sense. Mainline Christians, and Anglicans especially, now know from painful experience that none of these can hold a church together.

If the alternatives have failed, perhaps doctrine has more value than people have granted. For if mainline churches are to be united, both internally and with their sister churches around the world, they must first return to a common doctrine. Then all these things—an agreed ethical standard, a shared experience of the divine, meaningful dialogue, and a common loyalty to the church—will be added unto them.

The Church's Ministry

If doctrine is necessary to hold the church together, it is also necessary for the church to get anything done. The church cannot act effectively without knowing what it believes. It cannot convince its own members to work together or convince others to join them, if it cannot give them a reason.

The church cannot proclaim a word of judgment or speak a word of healing unless it can speak dogmatically, unless it can say with confidence, "Thus saith the Lord." Otherwise its words are just opinion, of no more value or interest than anyone else's. The church cannot speak a word of invitation or demand repentance and offer change and salvation unless it can say with confidence, "Thus saith the Lord." The church is not alone in offering salvation, and its version is often less appealing and more demanding than most versions the world offers. All it has to offer, its only selling point, is that the story it tells is true. To reach and to serve the world, the church must be dogmatic.

David Mills is the editor of Touchstone: A magazine of Mere Christianity (www.touchstonemag.com). This article was adapted from "Ancient & Postmodern Christianity" edited by Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall. Copyright (c) 2002 by Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall. Used with permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515, ivpress.com.

"Reprinted by permission of Good News Magazine, www.goodnewsmag.org."

READY FOR HIS RETURN

Joel B. Green

"Preaching in the evening at Spitalfields on 'Prepare to meet thy God,' I largely showed the utter absurdity of the supposition that the world was to end that night. But notwithstanding all I could say, many were afraid to go to bed, and some wandered about in the fields, being persuaded that, if the world did not end, at least London would be swallowed up by an earthquake. I went to bed at my usual time, and was fast asleep by ten o'clock."

As illustrated by this journal entry above, John Wesley was not one to predict dates for the end times. Yet that is not to say he was uninterested in a the second coming of Christ or eternal life.

In fact, it is not an over exaggeration to say that for Wesley everything is oriented to the fulfillment of God's rule in the coming kingdom. But the kingdom is no "pie-in-the-sky-in-the-sweet-by-and-by." It is a reality which calls for present, radical commitment-a life of Christian holiness and service under the present reign of Christ.

The kingdom now and then

The Old Testament depicts God's kingdom as the ideal existence where all men and women live under the reign of their Lord. The prophets expressed their hope in a new world, where God's rule would be extended universally-a time of peace and justice under God which would never end (Isaiah 2:4; Daniel 7:14; Zechariah 14:9).

In our own time the nature of the kingdom of God, especially as presented in the New Testament, has been a matter of controversy. Some have insisted that, for Jesus and the authors of the New Testament, the kingdom is a present reality. And they are right-partially. Jesus did teach that in his person and work the kingdom had invaded history (Matthew 12:22-28). Likewise, early Christianity proclaimed the present reign, or lordship, of Jesus Christ.

Wesley, too, spoke of "that kingdom of God upon earth whereunto all true believers in Christ, all real Christians, belong" ("Christian Perfection"). Life with God is not merely something to which we may look forward.

"Eternal life commences, when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts; when we first know Christ, then it is that heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper, heavenly state commences, while the love of God, as loving us, is shed abroad in the heart, instantly producing love to all mankind" ("Spiritual Worship").

In an important sense, then, the kingdom of God is a present reality.

But others have urged, with equal justification, that God's reign will be realized in the future. According to the gospels, Jesus looked for the kingdom to be fulfilled in the future. (See, for example, Matthew 7:21-23 and the parables about the kingdom.) The early Christians anticipated the fulfillment of the kingdom at Jesus' return (Revelation 11:15).

As strongly as Wesley emphasized the present experience of life with God, he was equally confident that the kingdom was "not yet." In a sermon based on Revelation 21:5-"Behold, I make all things new"-he underscored the future dimensions of God's kingdom:

"Very many commentators entertain a strange opinion, that this relates only to the present state of things; and gravely tell us that the words are to be referred to the flourishing state of the Church which commenced after the heathen persecutions. What a miserable way is this of making void the whole counsel of God, with regard to all that grand chain of events, in reference to his Church, yea, and to all mankind, from the time that John was in Patmos, unto the end of the world!" ("The New Creation").

The kingdom may be present, but it is also future. Can both be right, we may ask. Can the rule of God be both "present" and "not yet"? Yes! We experience a foretaste of the kingdom now, and yet long for its fulfillment when Jesus returns.

In his time, Wesley recognized this dual nature of God's reign, and in his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament wrote:

"The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are but two phrases for the same thing. They mean, not barely a future happy state in heaven, but a state to be enjoyed on earth.. In some places of Scripture the phrase more particularly denotes the state of it on earth; in others, it signifies only the state of glory; but it generally includes both" (on Matthew 3:2).

The Last Day

What will happen at the end, when Christ returns to establish his kingdom? Wesley often spoke of "that day"-that is, the final Day of the Lord. He thought of it in terms of three related events: 1. the general resurrection, 2. the final judgment, and 3. the new creation.

When Wesley taught on the general resurrection, he encouraged believers to "maintain [the resurrection] hope in its full energy; longing for that glorious day, when, in the utmost extent of the expression, death shall be swallowed up forever, and millions of voices, after the long silence of the grave, shall burst out at once into that triumphant song, O death, where is thy sting? O hades, where is thy victory?" (Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, on 1 Corinthians 15:55). At the resurrection we will be raised in glory, to receive new bodies-immortal and incorruptible.

Afterwards will come the judgment when the righteous will be separated from the unrighteous. At that time everything will be revealed-every appetite, inclination, affection, disposition: "So shall it be clearly and infallibly seen, who was righteous, and who was unrighteous; and in what degree every action or person or character was either good or evil" ("The Great Assize"). The end of this judgment is that the righteous will inherit eternal life and the unrighteous will be delivered into everlasting punishment.

What qualifies a person for eternal life? "[N]one shall live with God, but he that now lives to God; none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven, but that he bears the image of God on earth; none that is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter; none can see the kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Whosoever will reign with God in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth" ("A Blow at the Root; or Christ Stabbed in the House of His Friends").

This view of judgment and eternal life is fully consistent with Wesley's emphasis on personal holiness, on living out one's salvation by growing in Christ-likeness. For Wesley, the end times must never be divorced from life in the here and now.

At last, however, all will be made new-and Wesley accentuates the "all." Not only humanity, but "the whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigor, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a higher degree [as high] as the understanding of an elephant is beyond that of a worm" ("The Great Deliverance").

But the most glorious transformation will be that of men and women, as the effects of sin are nullified and God's people are fully restored. Then there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more death, and no more sin. "Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness, far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise" ("The New Creation").

When will all this take place, and what will be the sign of its coming? On this matter Wesley differed sharply from those who major on end-time speculation, in his day as in our own. In outlining his understanding of Christian perfection, he noted that Christians are never perfect in knowledge, and that our ignorance extends to the time of the Last Day.

We can be certain of the return of Christ and the consummation of the kingdom. But our certainty should not be the basis for speculation. Whatever the Bible does reveal about the end times, this knowledge is not given to tickle our ears or satisfy our curiosity, but to call us to a right response now. "Therefore, beloved, since you look to [a new heaven and a new earth], be diligent to be found by him in peace, spotless and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).

Wesley recognized that, in view of the coming kingdom and kingdom come, Scriptural Christianity calls for radical commitment now!

The demands of the kingdom

This present obedience, Wesley believed, should include two elements. First, he emphasized present commitment and devotion. In his sermon on "The Signs of the Times," Wesley taught that, if we want to be ready for the Day of the Lord, we must "begin at the root.. Now repent, and believe the Gospel!" Then, "Stir up the gift of God that is within you. Walk in the light, as he is in the light." Having become Christians through repentance and faith, we must grow in grace and holiness.

"The righteousness of Christ is doubtless necessary for a soul that enters into glory: But so is personal holiness too, for every child of man" ("On the Wedding Garment").

But personal commitment and devotion are only part of a right response to the future God has designed. For Wesley, Christianity was "inward religion," but much more. He goes on to give this counsel: "It behooves you, in the next place, to help your neighbors."

Scripture is never optimistic that human efforts will build the kingdom. After all, the kingdom is God's, and so he alone can usher it in. Nevertheless, we must prepare for the coming kingdom as we serve the Lord Jesus now.

This service is accomplished on the one hand as we, in Wesley's words, "proclaim the glad tidings of salvation ready to be revealed." On the other hand, "helping your neighbors" means working for social renewal, in Wesley's own ministry this concern was obvious in his efforts on behalf of the poor and imprisoned, and in his spirited denunciation of American slavery.

Living between the times

For now, we live between the first coming of Jesus and his future return, between the institution of the kingdom of God and its consummation. While we long for our future eternal life with God, the completion of our salvation, we can experience a foretaste of that life now as we serve the risen Lord.

Joel B. Green is vice president of academic affairs, provost and professor of New Testament interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. He is the author of numerous books, including What about the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology; Beginning with Jesus: Christ in Scripture, the Church and Discipleship; Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts (with Mark Baker); and Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology.

"Reprinted by permission of Good News Magazine, www.goodnewsmag.org."

RENEWAL 2007 CONFERENCE PREVIEW

On March 24, 2007, Evangelical Renewal Fellowship will hold its 5th annual conference. The **RENEWAL 2007** Conference is being planned and will be hosted by the Exeter United Methodist Church, Exeter, New Hampshire. The theme of the conference will be "*Sanctified Sexuality*", and the keynote speaker will be **Rev. Karen Booth, Transforming Congregations**.

During her presentation, Rev. Booth will be laying the Biblical groundwork for an understanding of human sexuality. What is God's created intent? How has that been distorted by sin? How do Jesus and the Holy Spirit bring about healing and transformation? What is sanctified sexuality (1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Thessalonians 4) and why does it matter? The second half of her presentation will focus on some practical ways a local church can respond to the sexually confused, broken, and sinful through Biblical instruction, compassionate outreach, and prophetic witness.



Rev. Karen Booth, Executive Director, Transforming Congregations

Rev. Karen Booth, who received her Master of Divinity from Drew Theological School, is an Ordained Elder in the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference and has pastored United Methodist Churches in Delaware and Maryland. She is currently the Executive Director, Transforming Congregations, Millsboro DE. Transforming Congregations is an approved ecumenical ministry of the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference and a member ministry of Exodus International. Transforming Congregations educates and equips local churches and clergy/lay leadership for ministry to the sexually broken and sinful, especially in the areas of same-sex attraction and gender confusion. This work includes maintaining a website, publishing a bi-annual journal, leading workshops and speaking at local churches and various other gatherings. More information about the ministry is available at <http://www.transformingcong.org>. Rev. Booth is a member of steering committees of UMAction and RENEW Network for Women. She is also a member of Association for Church Renewal, a coalition of mainline renewal leaders.

At the breakfast meeting, **Rev. Walter Fenton, Good News Director of Networking and Development**, will be speaking on what United Methodist evangelicals are doing around the country and how we might be more effective in New England. The title of his presentation will be "*Wise as Serpents, Gentle as Doves.*" He will offer some practical ways orthodox-evangelicals can work for renewal and reform in their annual conferences. He will particularly focus on strategic methods for electing delegates to the 2008 General and Jurisdictional Conferences and on preparing and presenting a positive legislative agenda at annual conference. As well as his important role in Good News, Rev. Fenton is an Elder in the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, and currently associate pastor at Princeton UMC. He is a graduate of Yale Divinity School.

RECENT BOOKS ON CHRISTIANITY AND RENEWAL

Prayer, Does It Make Any Difference? Philip Yancey, Zondervan, Copyright 2006

In his most powerful book since *What's So Amazing About Grace?* and *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey probes the very heartbeat—the most fundamental, challenging, perplexing, and deeply rewarding aspect—of our relationship with God: prayer. What is prayer? How does it work? And more importantly, does it work? In theory, prayer is the essential human act, a priceless point of contact between us and the God of the universe. In practice, prayer is often frustrating, confusing, and fraught with mystery. *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* is an exploration of the mysterious intersection where God and humans meet and relate. Writing as a fellow pilgrim, Yancey explores such questions as: Is God listening? Why should God care about me? If God knows everything, what's the point of prayer? Why do answers to prayer seem so inconsistent and capricious? Why does God seem sometimes close and sometimes far away? How can I make prayer more satisfying?

"I have found that the most important purpose of prayer may be to let ourselves be loved by God," says Yancey. *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* encourages us to pray to God the Father who sees what lies ahead of us, knows what lies within us, and who invites us into an eternal partnership—through prayer.

The Changing Face of World Missions, Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends, Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rhee, Douglas McConnell, Baker Academic, Copyright 2005

The latter part of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first have seen dramatic changes, both in global society and within the church. These changes have ramifications for the task of missions in the new millennium. *The Changing Face of World Missions*, the second volume in the *Encountering Mission* series, identifies and interacts with twelve significant trends that today's student of missions needs to understand. These trends include globalization, changing demographics, the shift from modernity to post-modernity, the shift from Christendom to global Christianity, changing motivations for missions, the impact of new technologies, and the issue of contextualization. The text is enhanced by numerous sidebars and case studies to foster individual and group reflection and discussion.

"This is a fascinating book that challenges Christians, particularly evangelical Christians, to rethink what they mean by mission and how they put their commitment to spreading the gospel into practice. It provides an excellent survey and evaluation of global developments as they influence and challenge evangelical missions worldwide. This book was a winner of the *Christianity Today* 2006 Book Award and *Outreach* magazine's Year's Best Award Winner, 2005

Biblical Ethics and Social Change, Stephen Charles Mott, Oxford University Press, Copyright 1982

In this scholarly synthesis of biblical studies and ethics, Stephen Charles Mott, working from the assumption that biblical principles are normative for Christian moral conduct, provides a thorough treatment of the biblical basis for implementing social change. Emphasizing the importance of change in both individual character and social order, the author covers such ethical subjects as evil, grace, love, and justice, and evaluates methods of achieving social change, including evangelism, the church serving as a counter community, direct action and civil disobedience, armed revolution, and political reform. Mott stresses the role of political authority in social change and concludes that it is incumbent upon the Christian to utilize all available means to redress injustice, meet basic needs, and provide that which is essential for inclusion in society.

Evangelical Renewal Fellowship

16 Church St.

Lancaster, NH 03584

603-788-2734

Web site: www.RenewNE.org

E-mail: tbentum@clergy.net

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 (1 July 2005-30 June 2007)

Executive Coordinator: **Pastor Tom Bentum**

Communications Coordinator: **Walter Ciesluk**

Conference Relations Coordinator: **Pastor Michael Pike**

Legislative Action Coordinator: **Pastor Brian Wood**

Membership Secretary: **Tammy Souza**

Prayer Coordinator: **Robbin Grill**

Recording Secretary: **Pastor Richard Pagano**

Regional Events Coordinator: **Pastor Dan Weaver**

RENEWAL Conference Director: **Pastor Tom Bentum**

Target Group Coordinator: **Pastor Brian Souza**

Treasurer: **Pastor Lloyd Leeman**