
RENEWAL



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Walter Ciesluk, Editor

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YOUR GOD IS TOO FAST

Rev. Dr. Thomas Bentum

Every once in awhile you read a book that you wish you had read a whole lot sooner. That is the case for me with Richard Mouw's book *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. It was published in 1992 and it popped up on my personal reading list a few weeks ago (I keep a reading list so that I avoid just reading trendy books). However, I wish I had read it back in 1992, the year I became a pastor in the United Methodist Church, because it would have helped shape my approach to renewal in the church. It may have helped me avoid some of the errors I have made in the last 16 years in dealing with the often uncivil discourse in our church around key issues.

There is a lot I would love to share with you from Mouw's book but I would like to focus in on a phrase that stood out to me in the last chapter titled "Serving a Slow God: Civility and the End of Time". He recall's J. B. Phillips' wonderful classic *Your God is Too Small* and how Phillips makes correctives to our spiritual life by holding up views of God that are inadequate from both biblical and practical standpoints. Mouw suggests an added corrective for today's Western-minded evangelicals "Your God is too fast!"¹

The point Mouw is trying to make by saying to evangelicals that our God is too fast is that we focus too much on wanting God to act quickly and decisively. If God is at work in a situation we expect to see fast and dramatic results. We are not as attuned to the more normal slow and patient work of God in our lives and in our world. The practical result is that in situations of conflict with our ideals we may react unnecessarily uncivilly toward others and miss the way God is at work. By not following God's slow pace we may indeed win a few dramatic battles but miss out on God's overall winning plan.

Perhaps one reason Mouw's point hit me is because I read his book while in the middle of studying Exodus. God dramatically rescues the people of Israel with the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. But then the people spend 40 years wandering in the desert learning what it means to follow God intimately. One would think that the drama of being brought out of Egypt would have won the people's hearts decisively and completely. It certainly got their attention. But when life got a little uncomfortable in the desert, slavery in Egypt and even worshiping their old Egyptian gods seemed a whole lot better. The rescue from Egypt was the focal point of the Israelite's remembrance, but it was the patient 40 years in the desert that made them a people ready to move into the Promised Land.

Another reason Mouw's point hit me is that I personally hunger for a dramatic solution to our struggling United Methodist Church. This fall I find myself weary of waiting and perhaps you feel that way too. A theme of much of my writing over the last few years is the call for patience and hanging in there but that is easier said than done. We have seen a lot of little victories both nationally and locally to restore orthodoxy in our church. Some of those victories remain unseen until more time has passed and we can evaluate where the turning points truly are. But in my

¹ Mouw, Richard, J., *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1992), p. 159.

heart I want something to happen quickly so that the church can soon once more be an effective instrument of God's mission and ministry in the world.

When I was working on secular college campuses developing campus ministry, part of my work was putting my students in summer missions programs. I heard back from one mission program that the leader really liked having the Christian students from the secular schools mixed in with those from Christian schools. The students from secular schools may not have had some of the knowledge that Christian college students had, but they were ready to lead and take risks because they were used to doing that already on campus. I have to wonder if God is not shaping and molding those of us striving to be a faithful witness in our wayward denomination for some special leadership role on behalf of the whole church in the future. That would certainly be within the character of a slow and patient God.

Should we not pray for something dramatic to happen? I believe we should. But we do that in tension with God's divine patience. That tension I believe is found in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come." Wrapped up in that is the promise that someday God will act decisively and make all things right. But also wrapped in that is the promise that we will experience the Kingdom of God daily and slowly just like a daily meal. Daily meals are not very exciting, and few are memorable, but we need them to help us grow both in the physical and the spiritual sense.

If our God is too fast we may be tempted to bale out too soon in difficult situations because we might assume God is not at work here. We may miss hearing what those who oppose orthodoxy have to teach us. (For example I am glad for what Progressives have taught me about racism and given me some needed correctives.) We may also miss being heard by others because our demand for immediate action might come across as arrogant or uncivil and alienate us. More importantly, we may miss the patient way God is shaping us for his planned future mission and ministry as a church. It is that future for which we work, even if it is not seen in our generation.

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SECOND ANNUAL ERF REFORM MEETING PLANNED

Rev. Dr. Thomas Bentum

Plans for the second Reform Meeting for the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship have been finalized. We will meet from 10am until about 2pm on Wednesday, January 21 at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Manchester, NH. Last year was our first meeting and we were able to submit 2 resolutions to the Annual Conference as a result. It was certainly the highlight of my year with ERF as we worked through the decision process, got the resolutions refined by our members, printed them in the AC booklet and had them discussed on the floor of conference. All ERF members are welcome to this meeting. I hope you will be able to attend this year as we do this important work. It would be helpful to me if you could let me know if you are coming. Oh yes, and bring your lunch!

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Walter J. Ciesluk

The Contagious Christian approach to evangelism is based on building relationships and starting spiritual conversations with people we are trying to reach for Christ. As an initial step, we need to be able to communicate *our story* of what Christ has done for us in a simple and concise manner. This is very important for several reasons.

First, our friends are interested. A natural outflow of our showing interest in them, listening to their concerns, and building an authentic relationship is that they will want to reciprocate and find out more about us. Real friends want to understand each other's thoughts, values, and backgrounds. Next, our friends can relate to it. We naturally tend to get close to people with similar interests and backgrounds, and it is likely that our friends will be able to relate our experience to their own. Your story does not have to be sensational or dramatic. If you spent most of your life as a "good" person, maybe even going to church and being religious, but without knowing Christ personally, then yours is a story that many people will be able to identify with. God can use this kind of a story powerfully for the many people with similar backgrounds who need to find Christ just as you did. Finally, your story is hard to argue with. When people see the God has changed your life, it becomes harder to deny the evidence that Christianity is true. As Chuck Swindoll puts it in his book *Come Before Winter*, "The skeptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church, but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been changed."

In Acts 26, we find Paul telling his story. Although there are a lot of important details, there are essentially three introductory sections, a challenging question to the listener, and a unifying theme.

The first section is about Paul's life *before Christ*. (Acts 26:4-11). Here, Paul tells about his life growing up. He was a Pharisee, and he was convinced that he should do everything possible to oppose the teachings of Jesus, including putting Christians in prison and even condemning them to death.

The second section is about Paul's *conversion*. (Acts 26:12-18). In these verses Paul relates how he came to Christ. He tells how he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, when Christ appeared to him and appointed him to be His servant and spokesperson.

The third section is about Paul's life *after Christ*. (Acts 26:19-23). Here we read about Paul's life since coming to Christ, how he preached that people should repent, turn to God, and prove their repentance by their deeds.

In verse 27, we see Paul ask the *question*: "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do." As the conclusion of the story, we see Paul asking his listener to respond or reply to what he just said which is what King Agrippa did. (Verse 18)

Finally, as we read through Paul's story, we find a *unifying theme*, which is zeal for serving God. Before Christ, his zeal was misplaced and destructive. After Christ, his zeal was positive and directed to building the church.

In the Contagious Christian course, we learn to build our stories around these same elements so that it will be easy to remember. Six questions are posed to help organize your story.

1. Where were you spiritually before receiving Christ, and how did that affect you—your feelings, attitudes, actions and relationships? (*before Christ*)
2. What caused you to begin considering God/Christ as a solution to your needs? (*before Christ*)
3. What realization did you come to that finally motivated you to receive Christ? (*conversion*)
4. Specifically, how did you receive Christ? (*conversion*)
5. How did your life begin to change after you trusted Christ? (*after Christ*)
6. What other benefits have you experienced since becoming a Christian? (*after Christ*)

And finally, we need to end our story with a *question* or statement that requires a response, and provide a *unifying theme*. As an example, I have attempted to develop *my own* story with these guidelines.

As a kid, I was raised in the Roman Catholic church and had a positive attitude about God. But, in my young adult years I began to have doubts and adopted a sort of an indifferent attitude about God and religion. For years, I remained passive while attending church with my wife and family. But over time, I continued to hear the gospel message and to observed others regularly experiencing and serving Christ and His church.

When my oldest son announced that he was planning to go to seminary and become a minister for Jesus Christ, I felt drawn to undertake an intellectual investigation into the evidence for God, the person of Jesus Christ, and the claims of Christianity. Through this process, I became convinced that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was true, and I could believe in His promise of eternal life for those who follow Him. As a consequence, I decided to declare my faith and trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior in a United Methodist Church profession of faith ceremony witnessed by the members of the church.

Since that time, I have felt at peace with God and myself. I have been motivated to strive to serve Christ and His church, and to become a better person and Christian. I have become totally convinced that I can trust God to be with me even beyond death.

I am sure we all have a story that can be used to attract people to Christ. Let's all put it together and be ready to share it with anyone willing to hear. Christ wants all people to experience the joy and peace that comes from serving him and receive the gift of grace, power of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of eternal life. What's your story?

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THE PRAYER CORNER

Robbin R. Grill

Here we are in that special time of the year when we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth. Please join with me in the following prayer adapted from Activated Ministries Magazine:

Jesus, You are God and man, King and servant of all. You left Your eternal throne in Heaven and took on mortality. You encased Yourself in human flesh and became one of us, so that You could save us. I am overwhelmed with emotion when I think of how You humbly and quietly came into our world and changed it forever. When You were born among us, You brought us the greatest gifts imaginable – salvation, peace, hope, love. Who would ever have thought such things would come in the form of a tiny baby, born to commoners, wrapped in rags, and laid to sleep in a feeding trough? Thank You that because of Christmas, I'm never alone. Whether or not I am blessed with family and friends, whether I face good times or hard times, I always have You and Your love. Thank You for choosing to experience both the joys and sorrows of earth. Thank You for enduring the tears, pain, frustration, loneliness, exhaustion and death so that You could truly say that You understand us. Never has there been a more perfect love than Yours!

My prayer is that each and every one of us will experience anew that wonderful love of Jesus. Let us not get entangled in the hectic pace of the season, but let us sit back and enjoy all the wonder of each moment. And I leave with you this prayer from *A treasure of Christmas Stories*, Henry Van Dyke, edited by James S. Bell, Jr.

A Prayer for Christmas Morning

The day of joy returns, Father in Heaven, and crowns another year with peace and good will. Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wisemen. Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love all over the world... Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil, by the blessing that Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our bed with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Robbin Grill is the coordinator of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship (ERF) prayer ministry.

PREACHING IN UNITED METHODISM TODAY

Will Willimon

I began my present job as Bishop of the North Alabama Conference by going around the state and conversing with small groups of laity. I asked the people in the pews, “What do you need most from me as your bishop?” In every group, there was always someone to say, “We need better preaching.”

One layperson offered a string of criticisms about the poor quality of her pastor’s sermons—just the sort of layperson I tend to avoid. Her concluding comment to me was, “Bishop, it’s too tough being black in Alabama without having good preaching to enable you to resist and to cope in a racist culture.” That woman’s testimonial was a poignant reminder that much is at stake in a sermon.

I swore that I would not appoint an elder to any church before I had heard that pastor preach. (It’s rather shocking that I had never been appointed to a church by anyone who had heard me preach—despite the laity’s insistence that they need, and deserve, good preaching.) I have had difficulty keeping my promise to God to hear the preaching of the preachers I appoint; however, through the miracle of video recording and my district superintendents, I have now heard the preaching of nearly two hundred pastors in my conference. This past year I listened and responded in writing to over sixty sermons of my clergy who were moving from one congregation to another. Listening to these sermons, combined with over twenty years of teaching homiletics in a seminary, qualifies me to say a thing or two about the state of preaching in United Methodism.

First, a prejudiced statement of the sort that you would expect a preacher to make: I believe that there is not much wrong with our church that can’t be cured by more faithful preaching of the gospel. The laity seem to know this better than we preachers. Paul sure knew it when he declared that “faith comes through hearing.” John Wesley began a grand conflagration that swept like wildfire across England and into North America on the basis of nothing but words. The Christian faith is an inherently auditory phenomenon. Preachers bring the gospel to speech, keep holding up before our people the truth of Jesus Christ, and say what needs to be said in order to be faithful disciples in our time and place.

I have this so prominently on my mind because I have just finished listening to the sermons of a dozen preachers who are under my care. Many of their sermons were lively and engaging and most congregations would hear them gladly on a Sunday morning. Yet with most of them, there was little indication that the content of the sermon or the engine driving the proclamation was the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Other than that, most were fine sermons.

One sermon began well enough, the Second Sunday of Christmas, Luke 2, young Jesus putting the temple elders through their paces, abandoned by Mom and Dad. After reading the text, and noting Jesus’ adorable ability to stupefy professional scholars, the preacher sailed off into a veritable shopping list of things we needed to do. We were told that we needed to resolve, in the coming year, to be more proficient in the study of God’s Word. We should strive to “increase in wisdom and in stature.” We ought to spend more time with our families. We ought, we should, we must....

I was struck by how quickly, how effortlessly, and predictably the preacher disposed of a wild story about Jesus and transformed it into a predictable moralistic diatribe about us. Moving from a text that simply declares what Jesus did and, by implication who Jesus is, it was as if the preacher said, “You don’t want to hear about Jesus; you want to hear about you.” Thus the sermon was mostly anthropology with just a dash of theology. Moving quickly from the biblical text, the pastor asserted a moralistic list of all the things that we need to do if we (in the absence of a living, active God) are to take charge of our lives, save ourselves by ourselves, and run the world.

Most congregations that I know love such sermons. These are the folk who say, “I like a sermon that tells me what I need to do to live a better life,” or “I like a sermon that gives me points to remember and to put into practice in my life.” Notice anyone missing in these definitions of a sermon? God. The sermon subtext is you are gods unto yourselves. Through this insight, this set of principles and platitudes you can save yourselves by yourselves. Whether preached by an alleged theological conservative or a card-carrying liberal, listening to most sermons in our church

indicates that we've become secular humanists. Auto-salvation is our goal. Church is where we come to get motivated to go out and run the world on our terms. God is humanity spoken in a resonant, upbeat voice backed up with a PowerPoint presentation.

We come to church, not to meet the Trinity, but rather to meet our responsibilities and to better our lives; to get our assignments for the week. When Wesleyan sanctification loses a living, active, resourceful, gracious God, it becomes insufferably boring and moralistic. The "sermon" is no better than a talk we could have heard at Rotary—and at least a civic club meets at a convenient hour of the week and serves lunch.

Sadly, a chief motivation for such anthropological preaching is evangelism. Reaching out to speak to the world, we fell in face down. Over confident in our assessment of what our audience will and will not hear, we have reduced the gospel to a set of sappy platitudes that anyone could accept and no sensitive, thinking American could resist. Our testimony has been reduced to whatever we think the market will bear. In the process of such "preaching," distinctive Christian speech was jettisoned and the discourse of pragmatic, utilitarian, therapeutic deism became the dominant preaching mode.

The fundamental question, "Is this true?" is set aside in favor of, "Will this work for me?"—evangelist Charles Finney's pragmatism and utilitarianism triumph. When preaching ceases to be about the truth of God in Jesus Christ, preaching degenerates into another program of human betterment, the old "Christ has no hands but our hands" sermonette for basically good people who are making progress.

Why bother? This is the message the world is already telling itself. Theologian Karl Barth convinced me that the Bible was more interesting than I could ever hope to be because the Bible is mainly about a living God. As Barth put it: "Preachers must not be boring. To a large extent the pastor and boredom are synonymous concepts. Listeners often think that they have already heard what is being said in the pulpit. They have long since known it themselves.... Against boredom the only defense is again being biblical. If a sermon is biblical, it will not be boring. Holy Scripture is in fact so interesting and has so much that is new and exciting to tell us that listeners cannot even think about dropping off to sleep."

Scripture keeps preaching theological because it is the nature of Scripture to speak primarily about God and only secondarily or derivatively about us. So the challenge of preaching is not to get to know our people and their needs but rather always to be obsessed by and tethered to the biblical text. I once advised pastors to "love your people." Now I tell them that the best way to love their people is to love the biblical text!

In seminary, someone told me to "share myself" in my preaching, to build on my "life experiences" and thereby "connect with the congregation" in my sermons. The trouble was, I walked into my first parish at twenty-four. A few weeks of peering into their lives convinced me that my life experiences were no match for the depth of their need and desire. I had to admit that if my listeners would be saved, it must be by the work of a God who loves to forgive sinners and to raise the dead. If their only hope was for progressive human betterment, they would be damned.

As Barth said on another occasion, there is only one preacher—Christ. Until the risen Christ shows up, speaks, commandeers the preacher, and thereby makes the sermon someone's Good News, it isn't a sermon. German church leader Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that the whole purpose of the sermon is to allow the risen Christ "to walk among his people."

Thus the Trinity is not only the subject but the agent of faithful preaching. We cannot allow preaching to be dominated by a humanly derived "how?" when our greatest challenge, and the source of our true power to preach is the divinely given "Who?" Specifically Christian preaching is not about the ways that we can get closer to God, but announcement of a God who has, wonder of wonders, found a way to get to us. Faithful preaching is theologically authorized. "And God said..." is the basis of everything. Can it be that our principles for better living delivered in PowerPoint, our "culturally relevant" communication techniques and "seeker sensitive" worship, are our latest attempts to keep a living, speaking, strange, and demanding God at a distance?

I recently heard a sermon based upon Jesus' parable of the seeds. After reading a wonderfully outrageous story of a farmer who sows by slinging seed everywhere, wasting a huge amount of seed in the process, the preacher immediately jumped into a list of things that we were to do if the seed is to germinate: we must carefully prepare people's hearts for the gospel, we must be diligent in rooting out our bad habits so that the good seed can grow, we must be willing to work hard in expectation of a good harvest. We ought, we should, we must.... Notice anyone missing from the sermon?

I worry that we have trained a generation of Christians to expect that every sermon ought to be about them—what they are to be and do. Faithful preaching is always an announcement of who God is and what God is doing in Jesus Christ. Rather than jump so quickly to questions like, "What am I to do with this?" and "How can I use this to make my life more meaningful?" we must again discipline ourselves to ask questions like, "Who is the God who meets us in Jesus Christ?" and "How does my life need to change in order to live with such an interesting God?"

When I was chaplain at Duke, one of my duties was the baccalaureate sermon. In order to prepare myself, I convened a group of graduating seniors and asked them questions like, "What is going on in your lives now? What issues would you like me to address in my baccalaureate sermon this year?"

The evening of our discussion a bright young woman said, "You should be studying the Bible to prepare for your sermon. It's a waste of time to study us. On graduation weekend, we're going to get lots of advice from lots of different people. You're a pastor. We don't want more advice. We want you to talk about God. That's got to be more interesting than advice."

I'm convinced that a factor in our denomination's decline is that we have (albeit unintentionally) given our people a rationale for secularity, a validation for godlessness. Many of them wake up on Sunday morning and can't figure out a reason to go to church because what they hear in church is so similar to all the other messages they get during the week. We have conditioned them to think that religion is something they do rather than a work of God. Boredom and disinterest are the inevitable results of allowing anthropology to take the place of Christology.

And by the way, if our church is going to get back in touch with the under-thirty crowd, then we better refurbish our theological commitments. From what I've seen of young adults, their attitude is that if the church is only about correct thinking, friendliness, social work, or anything else other than the worship and service of a living God, why bother?

I met a man in England last summer who, when he discovered that I was a Methodist said, "I once was a Methodist." I wanted to say to him, "That's nothing to brag about, there are millions of people just like you." When I asked him why he was no longer a Methodist, he explained: he had had a terrible week, his life was out of control, he had reached the end of his resources. So he went to his Methodist church on Sunday. His pastor's sermon was, "Better Roads for Britain." He never went back.

Recently my Cabinet visited one of our prominent seminaries where we interviewed a dozen of our students who are preparing for ordination. We asked them, among other questions, "Which ministerial activity do you feel most passion for and look forward to practicing once you earn your theological degree?"

Not one single student said "preaching." We have got to hold our seminaries more accountable for the preachers they produce and we must convince our future clergy that proficiency in preaching is the main skill that the church now needs in its leaders.

In our beloved denomination we have a good number of clergy who are fine preachers. And yet there appears to be little connection between clergy who preach well and how those clergy are deployed in the Connection. Those of us who are called to the ministry of oversight have got to do a better job of evaluating, recognizing, and affirming those clergy whom God has given special gifts for preaching and who spend the time and effort to put preaching at the center of their ministry. The laity want it; the gospel of Jesus Christ demands it.

When the women went to the tomb on the first Easter morning, they were met by a "young man in a long white robe" (Mark 16:4). They were told that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Then they were commanded, "Go, tell...."

Curiously, the women were not told to soothe the needs of hurting people, or to be in service to the world. They were not even told diligently to search the Scriptures. They were told, “Go, tell...” that is to preach. This is the church’s great commission as well as the chief means whereby the church continues as Christ’s church—preaching.

The great Methodist preacher of another age, Halford Luccock, told his preaching class about the little Methodist congregation somewhere in the Dakotas. One week they had a snowstorm that piled snow so deep that even the U.S. Mail couldn’t get through. That meant that the pastor had no idea whether it was United Nations Sunday, or Festival of the Christian Home Sunday, or Native American Sunday. So when a few people gathered despite the weather, the pastor rather embarrassedly told them that, since the mail didn’t get through, and since he had no idea what denominational program was to be emphasized this Sunday, they were going to diverge from their usual practice. This Sunday they would just worship God.

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IMAGES OF CHRISTMAS

Joseph Beardsley

Hopefully it is still possible to celebrate Christmas with both joy and authenticity. In our day, however, there are many ‘loaded’ expressions of the holiday. Even an innocent ‘Merry Christmas’ greeting may give offense. Many pitfalls can lead to negativity or judgementalism, so positive alternatives are much to be desired.

One positive opportunity, regardless of the cultural climate, is valuing and deepening our own heritage more each year. Indeed finding our own ‘path to Bethlehem’ is necessary. A path suggested to me involves something we all share: the image of infant Jesus and mother Mary. This, an icon for some, a greeting card and postage stamp for many, can become overly familiar. More than in our current practice, the Holy Child and Mother can be a blessing.

It is too easy to miss blessings that other traditions may have for us, even on tenets of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth. We may even find new ways for our distinctives to be proclaimed. For western Protestants, there can be doctrinal controversy and confusion. Word-made-flesh is at the heart of our witness as it was in the early centuries A.D.

In the formative period of the early church, many teachings tended to reduce the mystery of the Christ. The precious doctrine of the Word made flesh needed to be safeguarded. The birth to Mary was not just a holiday but a safeguard against faulty teaching. Here is an earthly mother, to whom humans can relate, saying in effect, ‘This is not about me; I am here to proclaim God Incarnate.’ The Mother-Child connection speaks volumes about Full Divinity and Full Humanity. Here is a simple but profound way for Affirmation of Faith--and Christmas--to come alive.

The mystery is anchored, not having to be fully explained. We are enabled to begin where we are, grow in grace, and trust for new light to be shed. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom says of a certain Holy Child-Mother ‘icon:’ ‘The [Mother’s] open eyes look deep inside her [self]. She is in contemplation. She holds the child without hugging Him...as one would hold something sacred that one is bringing as an offering, and all the tenderness, all the human love, is expressed by the Child, not by the mother. ...she treats the Child, not as baby Jesus, but as the Incarnate Son of God who has become the son of the Virgin and He, true man and true God.’ [[Beginning to Pray](#), p 109-10]

Tradition stood firm on God-in-Christ, yet did so in a positive, almost endearing way. Different facets of the Gift have been emphasized at different times. I am a grateful child of such a tradition. So, can a Christmas card or stamp also be a treasure trove of Christian doctrine? Next time you see one, consider it to be . . . an invitation.

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RECENT BOOKS ON CHRISTIANITY AND RENEWAL

The Beginning of All Things, Science and Religion, Hans Küng, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Copyright 2007

In an age when faith and science seem constantly to clash, can theologians and scientists come to a meeting of minds? Yes, maintains the intrepid Hans Küng, as he brilliantly argues that religion and science are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Focusing on beginnings---beginnings of time, of the world, of man, of human will---Küng deals with an array of scientific precepts and teachings. From a unified field theory to quantum physics to the Big Bang to the theory of relativity---even superstring and chaos theories---he examines all of the theories regarding the beginning of the universe and life (of all kinds) in that universe. Küng seeks to reconcile theology with the latest scientific insights, holding that "a confrontational model for the relationship between science and theology is out of date, whether put forward by fundamentalist believers and theologians or by rationalistic scientists and philosophers." While accepting evolution as scientists generally describe it, he still maintains a role for God in founding the laws of nature by which life evolved and in facilitating the adventure of creation. Exhibiting little patience for scientists who do not see beyond the limits of their discipline or for believers who try to tell experts how things must have been, Küng challenges readers to think more deeply about the beginnings in order to facilitate a new beginning in dialogue and understanding.

Evangelism after Christendom, The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness, Bryan P. Stone, Brazos Press, Copyright 2007

Evangelism conjures negative connotations throughout the world because it is heavily weighed down by cultural, historical, and theological baggage. Bryan Stone draws the blueprint for recovering an uplifting and vital church practice in his *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, named one of the "Fifteen Outstanding Books of 2007 for Mission Studies" by International Bulletin of Missionary Research. This comprehensive text begins by grounding evangelism as a core church practice that reaches the world, challenges sin, offers Christ, shares Christian worship, and more. Stone then traces the evangelistic call through the stories of Israel, Jesus, and, finally, the apostles and the church. Next, Stone discusses two rival narratives to the Christian story: the Constantinian story in which the church made itself home in the world; and the story of liberal modernity, which advocates an autonomous and temporal world. The practice of evangelism, however, subverts these views by 'being the church in the world' in a distinctive, alluring way. In short, Christian evangelism extends an invitation to challenge and abandon rival narratives and join a new story that makes sense of our past and points us to a different future. This book is ideal for seminary and graduate students as well as professional ministers, pastors, and evangelists.

Conviction without Compromise, Standing Strong in the Core Beliefs of the Christian Faith, Norman Geisler, Ron Rhodes, Harvest House Publishers, Copyright 2007

Did you ever wonder about how to talk with believers who disagree with your beliefs without compromising sound doctrine? In this remarkably clear presentation, Norman Geisler, one of the nation's leading apologetics experts, teams with Reasoning from the Scriptures president Ron Rhodes to explore the well-known saying "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Beginning with essential doctrines such as the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, Christ's deity, and 14 others, *Conviction without Compromise* provides solid scriptural defenses while showing how various movements have moved away from historic, biblical Christianity. Then the authors show why Christians can disagree agreeably about more than a dozen important but nonessential beliefs such as the nature of spiritual gifts, the role of women in the church, and the nature of sacraments. Finally, the section on charity highlights some "rules of engagement" and explores lessons learned from church history. A must-read for Christians who care about sharing their faith.

Evangelical Renewal Fellowship

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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 (1 July 2007-30 June 2009)

Executive Coordinator: **Pastor Tom Bentum**

Communications Coordinator: **Walter Ciesluk**

Prayer Coordinator: **Robbin Grill**

Reform Coordinator: **Pastor Brian Wood**

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