
RENEWAL



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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS **Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Bentum**

It is unfortunate that the Ed Johnson case that recently returned to the Judicial Council for reconsideration has locked us into the church's debate on homosexuality. Ed Johnson, a pastor in Virginia, denied membership to an unrepentant, practicing homosexual. His bishop saw this as discrimination against a homosexual and therefore removed Rev. Johnson from his position. The Judicial Council ruled against the bishop's actions. The Judicial Council did not confuse homosexual orientation with homosexual practice. The issue isn't homosexuality at all but the pastor's authority to deny membership to someone who is living in an unrepentant, destructive, sinful lifestyle. The Judicial Council ruled that the pastor indeed has that authority, even to the extent of overruling a bishop's intervention.

Now, if we can just get past the fact that the person denied membership was a practicing homosexual, we can have a truly, healthy and meaningful discussion in our conference and in the church as a whole on membership. The general church has already ruled (and continues to rule) that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching. If someone has no desire to change a behavior incompatible with Christian teaching, membership should be denied that person until he or she is ready to repent. Certainly we do not expect people to be perfect before joining the church, but willful disobedience is what we are dealing with.

Wesley words are instructive in his sermon *Of the Church*: "not only no common swearer, no Sabbath-breaker, no drunkard, no whoremonger, no thief, no liar, none that lives in any outward sin, but none that is under the power of anger or pride, no lover of the world, in a word none that is dead to God, can be a member of his Church." His key words are important, "outward sin", "under the power", "lover of the world", and finally, "dead to God". From these words we can see that the issues for Wesley were outward behavior and the will. The issues are not orientation or sinlessness.

There are two reasons that the discussion on membership is important to our church. One is that it is a key to growing our church. It is no accident that Wesley was so strong on membership and that it undergirded a vital movement of God. It is consistent with what we know about membership in growing churches today. Churches that are growing make it very easy to get involved in the church community but make the standards for signing on as a member challenging and meaningful.

In the United Methodist Church today there is a wide range of approaches to membership. I visited one church where the pastor gave an invitation each Sunday near the end of the service for anyone who wanted to join to simply come to the front of the church and join at that time. Training in discipleship came later. Another church I was in required membership classes, an interview with the pastor and regular meetings with a lay mentor before becoming a member. Is it any wonder that those of us who are pastors who move from church to church are continually frustrated by the mixed commitment of the members of our churches fostered by the variety of teachings on membership delivered by our predecessors over the years?

The second reason why membership is so important in our church is that it helps us get at the heart of who we are theologically. Discussion on membership naturally leads us to talk about whom we believe God is, whom we are and the nature of our relationship. I believe our confusion over our membership is symptomatic of our theological confusion. This confusion (or what is commonly called theological diversity) has not led to the hoped for freedom by our members. Instead it has left our church enslaved by the culture which seems to dictate more of how we live than our doctrines.

The opportunity to get at the heart of who we are is before us. The challenge is to keep the main issue the main issue and not be side tracked by important but secondary issues. How we clarify what a United Methodist member is could easily become the launching pad to a future healthy, dynamic church.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. -- Acts 2:14-21 (NIV)

**“AN UNWORKABLE THEOLOGY”
The Very Rev. Dr. Philip W. Turner III**

It is increasingly difficult to escape the fact that mainline Protestantism is in a state of disintegration. As attendance declines, internal divisions increase. Take, for instance, the situation of the Episcopal Church in the United States. The Episcopal Church's problem is far more theological than it is moral - a theological poverty that is truly monumental and that stands behind the moral missteps recently taken by its governing bodies.

Every denomination has its theological articles and books of theology, its liturgies and confessional statements. Nonetheless, the contents of these documents do not necessarily control what we might call the "working theology" of a church. To find the working theology of a church one must review the resolutions passed at official gatherings and listen to what clergy say Sunday by Sunday from the pulpit. One must listen to the conversations that occur at clergy gatherings--and hear the advice clergy give troubled parishioners. The working theology of a church is, in short, best determined by becoming what social anthropologists call a "participant observer."

For thirty-five years, I have been such a participant observer in the Episcopal Church. After ten years as a missionary in Uganda, I returned to this country and began graduate work in Christian Ethics with Paul Ramsey at Princeton University. Three years later I took up a post at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest. Full of excitement, I listened to my first Student sermon - only to be taken aback by its vacuity. The student began with the wonderful question, "What is the Christian Gospel?" But his answer, through the course of an entire sermon, was merely: "God is love. God loves us. We, therefore, ought to love one another." I waited in vain for some word about the saving power of Christ's cross or the declaration of God's victory in Christ's resurrection. I waited in vain for a promise of the Holy Spirit. I waited in vain also for an admonition to wait patiently and faithfully for the Lord's return. I waited in vain for a call to repentance and amendment of life in accord with the pattern of Christ's life.

The contents of the preaching I had heard for a decade from the pulpits of the Anglican Church of Uganda (and from other Christians throughout the continent of Africa) was simply not to be found. One could, of course, dismiss this instance of vacuous preaching as simply another example of the painful inadequacy of the preaching of most seminarians; but, over the years, I have heard the same sermon preached from pulpit after pulpit by experienced priests. The Episcopal sermon, at its most fulsome, begins with a statement to the effect that the incarnation is to be understood as merely a manifestation of divine love. From this starting point, several conclusions are drawn. The first

is that God is love pure and simple. Thus, one is to see in Christ's death no judgment upon the human condition. Rather, one is to see an affirmation of creation and the persons we are. The life and death of Jesus reveal the fact that God accepts and affirms us.

From this revelation, we can draw a further conclusion: God wants us to love one another, and such love requires of us both acceptance and affirmation of the other. From this point we can derive yet another: Accepting love requires a form of justice that is inclusive of all people, particularly those who in some way have been marginalized by oppressive social practice. The mission of the Church is, therefore, to see that those who have been rejected are included - for justice as inclusion defines public policy. The result is a practical equivalence between the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and a particular form of social justice.

For those who view the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops and its General Convention from the outside, many of their recent actions may seem to represent a denial of something fundamental to the Christian Way of life. But for many inside the Episcopal Church, the equation of the Gospel and social justice constitutes a primary expression of Christian truth. This isn't an ethical divide about the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. It's a theological chasm - one that separates those who hold a theology of divine acceptance from those who hold a theology of divine redemption.

Look, for example, at the increasingly common practice of inviting non-baptized persons to share in the Holy Eucharist. The invitation is given in the name of "radical hospitality." It is like having a guest at the family meal, so its advocates claim: it is a way to invite people in and evangelize.

Within the Episcopal Church, a sure test of whether an idea is gaining favor is the appearance of a question about it on the general-ordination exam. Questions on divorce and remarriage, the ordination of women, sexual behavior, and abortion all preceded changes in the Episcopal Church's teaching and practice. On a recent version of the exam, there appeared a question about "open communion for the non-baptized," which suggests that this is far more than a cloud on the horizon. It is, rather, a change in doctrine and practice that is fast becoming well established and perhaps should be of greater concern to the Anglican Communion's ecumenical partners than the recent changes in moral teaching and practice.

Indeed, it is important to note when examining the working theology of the Episcopal Church that changes in belief and practice within the church are not made after prolonged investigation and theological debate. Rather, they are made by "prophetic actions" that give expression to the doctrine of radical inclusion. Such actions have become common partly because they carry no cost. Since the struggle over the ordination of women, the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops has given up any attempt to act as a unified body or to discipline its membership. Within a given diocese, almost any change in belief and practice can occur without penalty.

Certain justifications are commonly named for such failure of discipline. The first is the claim of the prophet's mantle by the innovators-often quickly followed by an assertion that the Holy Spirit Itself is doing this new thing, which need have no perceivable link to the past practice of the church. Backed by claims of prophetic and Spirit-filled insight, each diocese can then justify its action as a "local option," which is the claimed right of each diocese or parish to go its own way if there seem to be strong enough internal reasons to do so.

All of these justifications are currently being offered for the practice of open communion - which is the clearest possible signal that it is an idea whose time has come in the Episcopal Church. But the deep roots of the idea are in the doctrine of radical inclusion. Once we have reduced the significance of Christ's resurrection and downplayed holiness of life as a fundamental marker of Christian identity, the notion of radical inclusion produces the view that one need not come to the Father through the Son. Christ is a way, but not the way. The Holy Eucharist is a sign of acceptance on the part of God and God's people, and so should be open to all - the invitation unaccompanied by a call to repentance and amendment of life.

This unofficial doctrine of radical inclusion, which is now the working theology of the Episcopal Church, plays out in two directions. In respect to God, it produces a quasi-deist theology that posits a benevolent God who favors love and justice as inclusion but acts neither to save us from our sins nor to raise us to new life after the pattern of Christ. In respect to human beings, it produces an ethic of tolerant affirmation that carries with it no call to conversion and radical holiness.

The Episcopal Church's working theology is also congruent with a form of pastoral care designed to help people affirm themselves, face their difficulties, and adjust successfully to their particular circumstances. The primary (though not the sole) pastoral formation offered to the Episcopal Church's prospective clergy has for a number of years been "Clinical Pastoral Education," which takes the form of an internship at a hospital or some other care-giving institution. The focus tends to be the expressed needs of a "client," the attitudes and contributions of a "counselor," and the transference and counter transference that define their relationship. In its early days, the supervisors of Clinical Pastoral Education were heavily influenced by the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers, but the theoretical framework employed today varies widely. A dominant assumption in all forms, however, is that the clients have, within themselves, the answer to their perplexities and conflicts. Access to personal resources and successful adjustment are what the pastor is to seek when offering pastoral care.

There may be some merit in putting new clergy in hospital settings, but this particular form does not lend itself easily to the sort of meeting with Christ that leads to faith, forgiveness, judgment, repentance, and amendment of life. The sort of confrontation often necessary to spark such a process is decidedly frowned upon. The theological stance associated with Clinical Pastoral Education is not one of challenge but one in which God is depicted as an accepting presence - not unlike that of the therapist or pastor.

But this should not be an unexpected development. In a theology dominated by radical inclusion, terms such as "faith," "justification," "repentance," and "holiness of life" seem to belong to an antique vocabulary that must be outgrown or reinterpreted. So also does the notion that the church is a community elected by God for the particular purpose of bearing witness to the saving event of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

It is this witness that defines the great tradition of the Church, but a theology of radical inclusion must trim such robust belief. To be true to itself it can find room for only one sort of witness: inclusion of the previously excluded. God has already included everybody, and now we ought to do the same. Salvation cannot be the issue. The theology of radical inclusion, as preached and practiced within the Episcopal Church, must define the central issue as moral rather than religious, since exclusion is in the end a moral issue even for God.

We must say this clearly: The Episcopal Church's current working theology depends upon the obliteration of God's difficult, redemptive love in the name of a new revelation. The message, even when it comes from the mouths of its more sophisticated exponents, amounts to inclusion without qualification.

Thinking back over my thirty-five years in the Episcopal Church, I was distressed to realize that this new revelation is little different from the basic message communicated to me during the course of my own theological education. Fortunately, in my case God provided an intervening event. I lived for about ten years among the Baganda, a people who dwell on the north shore of Lake Victoria. The Baganda have a proverb which, roughly translated, says, "A person who never travels always praises his own mother's cooking." Travel allowed me to taste something different. It was not until I had spent a long time abroad that I realized how far apart the American Episcopal Church stood from the basic content of "Nicene Christianity," with its thick description of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, its richly developed Christology, and its compelling account of Christ's call to holiness of life.

The future of Anglicanism as a communion of churches may depend upon the American Episcopal Church's ability to find a way out of the terrible constraints forced upon it by its working theology. Much of the Anglican communion in Africa sees the problem. Can the Americans? It is not enough simply to refer to the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer and reply, "We are orthodox just like you: we affirm the two testaments as the word of God, we recite the classical creeds in our worship, we celebrate the dominical sacraments, and we hold to episcopal order." The challenge now being put to the Episcopal Church in the United States (and, by implication, to all liberal Protestantism) is not about official documents. It is about the church's working theology - one which most Anglicans in the rest of the world no longer recognize as Christian.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE, AN EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE

Walter Ciesluk

Overview

Recently, the National Association of Evangelicals published an historic document on public engagement called “For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility”. “The new statement presents a strong, compelling, and comprehensive basis for evangelical political engagement. It captures both our domestic and international priorities, while acknowledging areas of consensus and disagreement. The declaration calls evangelicals to a biblically balanced concern that reflects the full range of God’s concerns for the well-being of marriage, the family, the sanctity of human life, justice for the poor, care for creation, peace, freedom and racial justice.

The statement appears to have broad endorsement and support in both the socially and politically conservative and liberal elements of the evangelical community. In a recent review (reference 1), Rev. Dr. Mark D. Roberts, a Presbyterian evangelical minister, recommended that “this statement should be widely read in Christian circles”. In another recent article (reference 2), Jim Wallis, a socially liberal evangelical and editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine, sums up by stating, ““For the Health of the Nation” is good news for the church and for the nation. And it is good news for a world in need of religious ethics that help us to sustain human life and the whole of God’s creation.”

“For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility”(reference 3) is carefully organized in a logical outline: Preamble; The Basis for Christian Civic Engagement; The Method of Christian Civic Engagement; Humility and Civility; The Structures of Public Life; Principles of Christian Political Engagement; and Our Commitment

The “Method of Christian Civil Engagement” section contains some very good guidance for all Christians and Christian Churches. Specifically, 1) Christians must seek in every area of life to submit to the authority of Scripture. 2) Christians must do detailed social, economic, historical, jurisprudential, and political analysis to understand our society and wisely apply a normative vision to political questions. 3) Christians must remember that social problems arise and can be substantially corrected by both personal decisions and structural changes; thus they must seek to transform both individuals and institutions, because lasting social change requires both personal conversion and institutional renewal and reform. 4) Christians must be clear that God cares about the well-being of marriage, the family, the sanctity of human life, justice for the poor, care for creation, peace, freedom, and racial justice, which calls for a biblically balanced agenda. 5) Christians must approach political engagement with humility and earnest prayer for divine guidance and wisdom; they can expect that they will differ with other Christians and non-Christians over the best policies. And finally 6) Christians must maintain their integrity and keep their biblical values and commitment to the Lordship of Christ intact.

The “Principles of Christian Political Engagement” section focuses on seven specific issues or areas of concern. Each of the seven principles are excerpted below.

Principles of Christian Political Engagement

1. We work to protect religious freedom and liberty of conscience

“God has ordained the two co-existing institutions of church and state as distinct and independent of each other with each having its own areas of responsibility (Rom. 13:1-7; Mark 12:13-17; Eph. 4:15-16, 5:23-32). We affirm the principles of religious freedom and liberty of conscience, which are both historically and logically at the foundation of the American experiment. The First Amendment’s guarantees of freedom of speech, association, and religion provide the political space in which we can carry out our differing responsibilities. Because human beings are responsible to God, these guarantees are crucial to the exercise of their God-given freedom. As God allows the wheat and tares to grow together until the harvest, and as God sends the rain on the just and on the unjust, so those who obey and those who disobey God coexist in society and share in its blessings (Matt. 5:45, 13:24-30). Religion is not just an individual matter, but also refers to rich communal traditions of ultimate belief and practice. Participating in the public square does not require people to put aside their beliefs or suspend the practice of their religion. All persons should have equal access to public forums, regardless of the religious content or viewpoint of their speech. Likewise, judicial standards

should protect and respect not only religiously compelled practices, but also religiously motivated behavior. The First Amendment's Establishment Clause is directed only at government and restrains its power. Thus, for example, the clause was never intended to shield individuals from exposure to the religious views of nongovernmental speakers. Courts should respect church autonomy in matters relating to doctrine, polity, the application of its governing documents, church discipline, clergy and staff employment practices, and other matters within the province of the church (Acts 18:12-17)."

2. We work to nurture family life and protect children

"From Genesis onward, the Bible tells us that the family is central to God's vision for human society. God has revealed himself to us in the language of family, adopting us as his children (Rom. 8:23, Gal. 4:5) and teaching us by the Holy Spirit to call him *Abba Father* (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6). Marriage, which is a lifetime relationship between one man and one woman, is the predominant biblical icon of God's relationship with his people (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:20, 31:32; Ezek. 16:32; Eph. 5:23, 31-32). In turn, family life reveals something to us about God, as human families mirror, however faintly, the inner life of the Trinity."

"Government does not have the primary responsibility for guaranteeing wholesome family life. That is the job of families themselves and of other institutions, especially churches. While providing individuals with ways to remedy or escape abusive relationships, governments should promote laws and policies that strengthen the well-being of families. Many social evils—such as alcohol, drug, gambling, or credit-card abuse, pornography, sexual libertinism, spousal or child sexual abuse, easy divorce, abortion on demand—represent the abandonment of responsibility or the violation of trust by family members, and they seriously impair the ability of family members to function in society. These evils must be viewed not only as matters of individual sin and dysfunction, but also as violations of family integrity. Because the family is so important to society, violations of its integrity threaten public order. Similarly, employment, labor, housing, health care, and educational policies concern not only individuals but seriously affect families. In order to strengthen the family, we must promote biblical moral principles, responsible personal choices, and good public policies on marriage and divorce law, shelter, food, health care, education, and a family wage (Jas. 5:1-6). We commit ourselves to work for laws that protect and foster family life, and against government attempts to interfere with the integrity of the family. We also oppose innovations such as same-sex "marriage." We will work for measures that strengthen the economic viability of marriages and families, especially among the poor. We likewise commit ourselves to work within the church and society to strengthen marriages, to reduce the rate of divorce, and to prepare young adults for healthy family life."

3. We work to protect the sanctity of human life and to safeguard its nature

"Because God created human beings in his image, all people share in the divine dignity. And because the Bible reveals God's calling and care of persons before they are born, the preborn share in this dignity (Ps. 139:13). We believe that abortion, euthanasia, and unethical human experimentation violate the God-given dignity of human beings. As these practices gain social approval and become legitimized in law, they undermine the legal and cultural protections that our society has provided for vulnerable persons. Human dignity is indivisible. A threat to the aged, to the very young, to the unborn, to those with disabilities, or to those with genetic diseases is a threat to all. Where the negative implications of biotechnology are unknown, government ought to err on the side of caution. Christians must welcome and support medical research that uses stem cells from adult donors and other ethical avenues of research. But we must work toward complete bans on human cloning and embryonic stem-cell research, as well as for laws against discrimination based on genetic information."

4. We seek justice and compassion for the poor and vulnerable

"Jesus summed up God's law by commanding us to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:35-40). By deed and parable, he taught us that anyone in need is our neighbor (Luke 10:29-37). Because all people are created in the image of God, we owe each other help in time of need. God identifies with the poor (Ps. 146:5-9), and says that those who "are kind to the poor lend to the Lord" (Prov. 19:17), while those who oppress the poor "show contempt for their Maker" (Prov. 14:31). Jesus said that those who do not care for the needy and the imprisoned will depart eternally from the living God (Matt. 25:31-46). The vulnerable may include not only the poor, but women, children, the aged, persons with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, minorities, the persecuted, and prisoners. God measures societies by how they treat the people at the bottom. God's prophets call his people to create just and righteous societies (Isa. 10:1-4, 58:3-12; Jer. 5:26-29, 22:13-19; Amos 2:6-7; Amos 4:1-3, 5:10-15). The

prophetic teaching insists on both a fair legal system (which does not favor either the rich or the poor) and a fair economic system (which does not tolerate perpetual poverty). Though the Bible does not call for economic equality, it condemns gross disparities in opportunity and outcome that cause suffering and perpetuate poverty, and it calls us to work toward equality of opportunity. God wants every person and family to have access to productive resources so that if they act responsibly they can care for their economic needs and be dignified members of their community. Christians reach out to help others in various ways: through personal charity, effective faith-based ministries, and other nongovernmental associations, and by advocating for effective government programs and structural changes.”

“Economic justice includes both the mitigation of suffering and also the restoration of wholeness. Wholeness includes full participation in the life of the community. Health care, nutrition, and education are important ingredients in helping people transcend the stigma and agony of poverty and re-enter community. Since healthy family systems are important for nurturing healthy individuals and overcoming poverty, public policy should encourage marriage and sexual abstinence outside marriage, while discouraging early onset of sexual activity, out-of-wedlock births, and easy divorce. Government should also hold fathers and mothers responsible for the maintenance of their families, enforcing where necessary the collection of child-support payments. Restoring people to wholeness means that governmental social welfare must aim to provide opportunity and restore people to self-sufficiency. While basic standards of support must be put in place to provide for those who cannot care for their families and themselves, incentives and training in marketable skills must be part of any well-rounded program. We urge Christians who work in the political realm to shape wise laws pertaining to the creation of wealth, wages, education, taxation, immigration, health care, and social welfare that will protect those trapped in poverty and empower the poor to improve their circumstances. We further believe that care for the vulnerable should extend beyond our national borders. American foreign policy and trade policies often have an impact on the poor. We should try to persuade our leaders to change patterns of trade that harm the poor and to make the reduction of global poverty a central concern of American foreign policy. We must support policies that encourage honesty in government, correct unfair socioeconomic structures, generously support effective programs that empower the poor, and foster economic development and prosperity.”

5. We work to protect human rights

“Because God created human beings in his image, we are endowed with rights and responsibilities. In order to carry out these responsibilities, human beings need the freedom to form associations, formulate and express beliefs, and act on conscientiously held commitments. As recipients of God’s gift of embodied life, people need food, nurture, shelter, and care. In order to fulfill their God-given tasks, all people have a right to private property. God’s design for human existence also implies a right to marry, enjoy family life, and raise and educate children. While it is not the primary role of government to provide everything that humans need for their well-being, governments are obligated to ensure that people are not unjustly deprived of them and to strengthen families, schools, businesses, hospitals, social-service organizations, and other institutions so they can contribute to human welfare. At the same time, government must fulfill its responsibilities to provide for the general welfare and promote the common good.”

“Governments should be constitutionally obligated to protect basic human rights. We believe that American foreign policy should reward those countries that respect human rights and should not reward (and prudently employ certain sanctions against) those countries that abuse or deny such rights. Because the Creator gave human beings liberty, we believe that religious liberty, including the right to change one’s religion, is a foundational right that must be respected by governments. Freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are closely related to religious liberty, and people must be free to express their vision for a just social order without fear of torture or other reprisal. We also oppose the expansion of “rights talk” to encompass so-called rights such as “same-sex marriage” or “the right to die.” Inappropriately expanded rights language has begun to function as a trump card in American discourse that unfairly shuts down needed discussion.”

“America has a tragic history of mistreating Native Americans, the cruel practice of slavery, and the subsequent segregation and exploitation of the descendants of slaves. While the United States has achieved legal and social equality in principle, the legacy of racism still makes many African Americans, Hispanics, and other ethnic minorities particularly vulnerable to a variety of social ills. Our churches have a special responsibility to model good race relations (Rom. 10:12).”

6. We seek peace and work to restrain violence

“Jesus and the prophets looked forward to the time when God’s reign would bring about just and peaceful societies in which people would enjoy the fruits of their labor without interference from foreign oppressors or unjust rulers. But from the beginning, Christians have recognized that God did not call them to bring in God’s kingdom by force. While all Christians have agreed that governments should protect and restore just and peaceful social orders, we have long differed on when governments may use force and whether we may participate in government-authorized force to defend our homelands, rescue others from attack, or liberate other people from oppression. The peaceful settling of disputes is a gift of common grace. We urge governments to pursue thoroughly nonviolent paths to peace before resorting to military force. We believe that if governments are going to use military force, they must use it in the service of peace and not merely in their national interest. Military force must be guided by the classical just-war principles, which are designed to restrain violence by establishing the right conditions for and right conduct in fighting a war. In an age of nuclear and biological terrorism, such principles are more important than ever.”

“We urge followers of Jesus to engage in practical peacemaking locally, nationally, and internationally. As followers of Jesus, we should, in our civic capacity, work to reduce conflict by promoting international understanding and engaging in non-violent conflict resolution.”

7. We labor to protect God’s creation

“As we embrace our responsibility to care for God’s earth, we reaffirm the important truth that we worship only the Creator and not the creation. God gave the care of his earth and its species to our first parents. That responsibility has passed into our hands. We affirm that God-given dominion is a sacred responsibility to steward the earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part. We are not the owners of creation, but its stewards, summoned by God to “watch over and care for it” (Gen. 2:15). This implies the principle of sustainability: our uses of the Earth must be designed to conserve and renew the Earth rather than to deplete or destroy it. The Bible teaches us that God is not only redeeming his people, but is also restoring the whole creation (Rom. 8:18-23). Just as we show our love for the Savior by reaching out to the lost, we believe that we show our love for the Creator by caring for his creation.”

“Because clean air, pure water, and adequate resources are crucial to public health and civic order, government has an obligation to protect its citizens from the effects of environmental degradation. This involves both the urgent need to relieve human suffering caused by bad environmental practice. Because natural systems are extremely complex, human actions can have unexpected side effects. We must therefore approach our stewardship of creation with humility and caution.”

“Human beings have responsibility for creation in a variety of ways. We urge Christians to shape their personal lives in creation-friendly ways: practicing effective recycling, conserving resources, and experiencing the joy of contact with nature. We urge government to encourage fuel efficiency, reduce pollution, encourage sustainable use of natural resources, and provide for the proper care of wildlife and their natural habitats.”

Implications for the United Methodist Church

The methodology and principles for Christian civil engagement as well as the other sections presented in the “Health of the Nation” statement appear to be comprehensive, well reasoned, and worthy of study and reflection by all Christians. I would highly recommend that every United Methodist read the statement. At the same time, I would think that the leadership of the United Methodist Church, given its long history and tradition of social justice, would be interested in reviewing and perhaps revisiting some of its own UM social principles in light of this new declaration.

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RECENT BOOKS ON CHRISTIANITY AND RENEWAL

The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci, Ben Witherington III, Intersity Press, Copyright 2004

The Da Vinci Code, a novel by Dan Brown, has been at the top of the New York Times bestseller list for more than 40 weeks. The book has stirred controversy about Brown's handling of religious documents, including the Bible, and his treatment of early Christian history. In *The Gospel Code*, a response to *The Da Vinci Code*, Ben Witherington III writes: "He [Brown] is not merely out of his depth, he is in fact a purveyor of errors of both fact and interpretation, including some mistakes that even the most amateur student of religious history should never make."

In *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci*, Witherington sets out to unravel the mistakes made by Brown as he exposes the historical errors of *The Da Vinci Code*. "What these errors by Brown show is a pattern of eccentric interpretation of sources, which carries over into the interpretation of early Christianity and the biblical sources," writes Witherington. He explains that he is not concerned so much about the errors regarding the later Catholic Church, various Popes, Da Vinci, etc. However, exposing the foundational errors about Jesus, Mary and the canon of Scripture are crucial.

Witherington explains: "While many traditional Christians might be tempted to scoff and dismiss such books as either mere fiction or, in the case of more serious works, the opinions of a few fringe scholars, this would be a serious mistake. We are living in the midst of a religious cultural revolution when it comes to some of the basic truths held to be self-evident about Jesus and early Christianity and the Bible."

Lord, Disciple Me, Richard Mull, Destiny Image Publishers, Copyright 2005

God desires to take you on a journey much like that of Jesus' first disciples, who learned to do what Jesus was doing by observing Him in action and obeying what He taught. This book will challenge you to develop a biblical foundation for your journey. Jesus will provide the hands-on experience! Richard Mull will teach you about Jesus' design for discipleship by raising and carefully addressing the following questions:

- What is discipleship, according to Jesus?
- Can the church today possess the power of the early disciples?
- Can we pray specific prayers and expect answers?
- Does God still use His people to heal the sick?
- Are miracles and deliverance still part of Jesus' disciple-making agenda?

Turning the Mainline Around, How Renewal Movements are Changing the Church, Thomas C. Oden, BakerBooks, Copyright 2006

Where is mainline Protestantism headed? Today's mainline Protestant denominations seem as theologically liberal as ever. But the real story of change in the mainline today is how confessing and renewal movements are crossing denominational lines to infuse new life into these traditions. "Turning Around the Mainline" carefully chronicles the roots and history of these evangelical and orthodox renewal movements. Thomas Oden lays out the current issues and major themes of each movement and addresses the concern many confessing churches are facing today: what property rights they have in disputes with their denominations.

"Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."-- Jude 1:3

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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 2005-30 June 2007)

Executive Coordinator: **Pastor Tom Bentum**

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Conference Relations Coordinator: **Pastor Michael Pike**

Legislative Action Coordinator: **Pastor Brian Wood**

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