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# RENEWAL



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## TWO LANGUAGES Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Bentum

After sitting through another Annual Conference and being told yet again at various points that I am an oppressor and equal to someone in favor of slavery because I am opposed to same sex partnerships, I reflected again on the nature of the debate. These are serious charges that are being leveled against me, albeit in a general and not a personal sort of way. I take these charges seriously. But I feel like those who are making the charges are speaking an entirely different language than I am. If they are serious about converting me they need to talk my language.

I really have only two simple questions that need to be addressed by those in favor of homosexual partnerships, or a number of other issues, actually. But the nature of these questions carry with them some assumptions that make it hard to answer or even taken seriously by many in the pro-homosexual partnership camp. So this is really an open appeal to my friends and colleagues in that camp to bridge the communication gap as well as some thoughts to my fellow evangelicals about the communication problem.

The first question is obvious for an evangelical to ask, "Could you show me in the Bible a clear positive reason to reject 2000 years of church interpretation that homosexual partnership is wrong?" Now the typical answer I get is that the principle of love overrides all the "minor" negative statements in the Bible. If two people enter into a loving, committed relationship it should not matter what gender they are. But that does not really answer the question. If something is immoral, it is obviously not a loving thing to practice it. We live in a culture that uses love to justify all kinds of destructive behavior and as Christians we need to live above the prevailing culture. When the church struggled with slavery and the oppression of woman, the positive reasons to reject those practices biblically rose to the top, but I just don't see the same thing with homosexual practice.

But the real problem with this question is that it assumes that we can look for the original intent of the authors of the Bible and see if we have missed something here that needs to be corrected after 2000 years. The progressive trend is that it is one's reaction to the text that takes precedence over what the original author intended. This is not only a philosophical divide in biblical interpretation, but it also shows up in the legal system. You will find lawyers on both sides of the debate concerning whether the original intention of the framers of the Constitution matters or not. I want to know if I have missed something in the authors' intent, but others would argue that it is my personal perspective or politics that matters most.

The second question is more practical, but again highlights the divide that is there. The question is, "Will the acceptance of homosexual partnerships lead to positive outcomes for individuals or, more broadly, the world?" If we are going to make homosexual partnerships normative after all these years, I want to know if there is any evidence that it is a good thing. The fact is there is no evidence in history that this is a good thing because by accepting homosexual partnerships as a church or as a society we would be entering into a huge experiment. The typical answer I get to this is the arrogance of modernity answer. It goes like this, "We as modern, advanced people have arrived at the point

where we know better than all the generations before us.” I personally have a hard time seeing the evidence that we have arrived at a morally superior position in this time to make such judgments.

Where we might look to the authority of evidence in this matter as evangelicals, this is often not true with those in favor of homosexual partnerships. Morality has become a relative thing and what matters more is your political position and the power to make it happen. I remember watching the show *20/20* a few years back and there was some new scientific data out that men and women are not the same; there is a difference in how our brains are wired. There are some things men do better than women and *vice versa*. The feminists interviewed were outraged, not at the data, but the fact that it was being aired on TV and would rob the feminist agenda of some of its power. It would seem to me that it would be more productive to debate the evidence and its conclusions, but that was not the case.

The divide here is really not over homosexual partnerships, but the language we speak, in other words, the assumptions we hold. The homosexual issue is caught in the middle of a larger debate as well as a number of other issues. Evangelicals tend to speak the language of authorship and authority, where as those who call themselves progressive tend to speak the language of power and politics. I do not know definitively how to bridge this language barrier, but I do hope that understanding the assumptions we carry into a conversation might make us more sensitive. I certainly do not want to be lumped into the same group as slave holders, but I can understand why that might happen from a certain perspective. However, I don't think such strident language helps foster much understanding or consensus.

I am reminded of an experience I had in high school when a foreign exchange student from Brazil stayed the winter with a friend of mine. Shortly after he got off the plane we all sat down to play Monopoly, a game that the Brazilian student had never played. He did not speak English well and we soon found ourselves shouting at him trying to get him to understand the rules. Finally, one of my friends had an insight. He pointed out that the problem with the Brazilian student was not deafness and shouting was only making things worse. We all felt embarrassed when we realized how foolish our shouting was. We then took the better approach of slowing down the pace and taking the time to develop real communication. Perhaps that same lesson applies here.

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**THE MISSION SOCIETY FOR UNITED METHODISTS**  
**Rev. Lloyd Leeman**

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The Mission Society for United Methodists was founded in 1984 by a group of United Methodist clergy, laity and missiologists who felt compelled by God to create a new mission agency of Wesleyan roots. The new agency would expand the mission outreach of local United Methodist churches and would join the worldwide Body of Christ in proclaiming the name of Christ around the globe. The primary emphasis of the Mission Society seeks to create self-reproducing, indigenous, discipling Christian communities by mobilizing cross-cultural witnesses for Christ in partnership with nationals.

The Mission Society currently has 180 missionaries in 31 countries around the world working in a variety of ministries that seek to both spread the Gospel of Christ and aid in community development and relief efforts where needed. Formed as a “faith-based” organization, the Mission Society does not receive denominational funding and works with a variety of Wesleyan evangelical denominations both within the United States and in other parts of the world. As the center of Christendom shifts and globalization alters the world in which we live, the Mission Society continues to grow and transform to minister effectively in this evolving context. To learn more about The Mission Society and its work, visit the web site at [www.themissionsociety.org](http://www.themissionsociety.org).

At this time, the Mission Society needs a Volunteer Mission Representative from the New England Annual Conference. Volunteer Mission Representatives serve to help pastors, mission committees and individuals implement the vision the Lord is giving them to reach the world with the Gospel. Presently, there are thirty-nine representatives who also introduce the Mission Society where it is yet unknown and assist those called to mission ministry to begin the application process. It is the goal to have at least one Mission Representative in every Annual Conference. **If you have a passion for missions and desire to serve the Lord as a Mission Representative to The Mission Society**, please contact Rev. Lloyd Leeman, at 202-778-4517 or [LloydLeeman@msn.com](mailto:LloydLeeman@msn.com).

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## CHURCHES REPEATING PAST MISTAKES ON HUMAN RIGHTS—AND MAKING NEW ONES

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*by Alan Wisdom and Erik Nelson*

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In July of 2004, former World Council of Churches president Konrad Raiser made an apology that was rather roundabout, but nonetheless stunning. “In retrospect,” Raiser admitted, “it would appear that the ecumenical organizations have not sufficiently recognized—at least at the official level—the historic legitimacy and the political potential of the dissident movements in the Communist countries.”

Raiser recalled that the WCC “gave priority attention [in the 1980s] to the struggles against racism and for justice and liberation in the southern countries” of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But he added that the council and other mainline Western Christian bodies should have been more supportive of dissident groups like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s.

Necessary as this confession was, it is unfortunate that it could not have come sooner. Raiser’s acknowledgment of past failure to stand up for oppressed peoples behind the Iron Curtain will prove useful only if a lesson has been learned from that failure. Mainline Protestant churches pride themselves on being defenders of human rights worldwide. But are those churches raising a more consistent voice for human rights around the globe today?

### **Disturbing Patterns**

Some of us at the Institute on Religion & Democracy had doubts. To answer our questions, we analyzed human rights criticisms made by four U.S. mainline Protestant denominations (the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)) and two ecumenical bodies (the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches) over a period of four years (2000-2003) to determine which nations were criticized for human rights violations and why. We used the human rights assessments published by Freedom House in 2004 as a benchmark for human rights in nations analyzed.

Here is what we found: Of the 197 human rights criticisms made by the churches and ecumenical bodies that we studied, 37 percent was directed against Israel—a “free” nation, under the Freedom House criteria. Another 32 percent targeted the United States—also “free.” The remaining 31 percent was spread among twenty other nations.

Only 19 percent of the church criticism was aimed at nations deemed “not free,” while eight percent touched upon “partly free” nations. Of the 15 countries rated lowest by Freedom House, only five were criticized during the four-year period. Some of the worst offenders—such as North Korea, China, and Saudi Arabia—were not criticized even once. Mainline churches never criticized any of Israel’s neighbors, despite their mostly dismal records on human rights. There were no criticisms registered against any governments in Central Asia, one of the least free regions in the world.

Unquestionably, every nation—including the United States and Israel—can be faulted for some human rights violations. We can imagine a plausible explanation for U.S. churches paying particular attention to their own country. It is the world’s most powerful nation, and it is the nation that U.S. Christians can influence most directly.

But why the wildly disproportionate criticism aimed at the small and solitary nation of Israel? Mainline church leaders typically explain that they are concerned for the suffering Palestinian people. Yet not a single church statement during four years spoke a word against the Palestinian Authority, despite the many abuses that it visited upon its own people and the violence that it unleashed against Israeli civilians.

Church leaders oft en disparage the U.S. role in the Middle East, arguing that our government cannot be an honest broker of peace as long as it is so single-mindedly pro-Israel. But at least the U.S. government occasionally objects to some Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza. Why have the mainline U.S. churches not criticized oppressive policies by the Palestinian Authority? How can they offer themselves as potential peacemakers?

## **An Honest Answer is Required**

We have to ask the difficult question of what drives this unbalanced approach to human rights. Undoubtedly, motives are mixed. Many hands are at work in shaping mainline human rights advocacy. But we see a pattern that reproduces much of the same thinking that distorted that advocacy during the Cold War. There is an ideological template that identifies abuses only where they can be attributed to Western imperialism (Israel being seen as a Western entity). There is a desire to be in solidarity with movements (such as Palestinian nationalism) claiming to liberate peoples oppressed by such imperialism. There is an eagerness to make peace with America's enemies (such as Islamist radicals) by overlooking their faults. And there is a moral relativism that is reluctant to impose Western ideals of human rights upon non-Western dictators (such as most Arab rulers).

But, even taken together, these explanations do not suffice. Why the fusillade of criticism against the world's only Jewish state, when there are so many other fallible U.S. allies that could be equal or greater targets? Could some kind of anti-Jewish animus be present among "our kind of people" in the mainline elites?

Some Jewish leaders have made the direct accusation of anti-Semitism, especially in the wake of last year's Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) decision to "initiate a phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel."

Let us draw an analogy. Many of these same liberal church leaders have been ready to call the U.S. justice system "racist" because of racial disparities in the application of the death penalty. While the disparate sentences by themselves do not prove racist motivation in judges and juries, they should provoke a serious examination of the system.

The statistics in our study should provoke the same kind of self-examination with regard to mainline church human rights advocacy. Have our churches really learned the lessons of the Cold War? Are they really being the courageous voice for the voiceless victims around the world? Or are they letting old prejudices drive a very slanted critique of human rights violations? Are mainline U.S. elites falling into the same kind of anti-Semitism that has become a staple of the European left? The good name of the Church depends upon an honest answer.

## **Broader and More Balanced Advocacy Needed**

We believe that our churches would be well served by broadening their human rights advocacy. They need to reaffirm the transcendent origins of human rights. They must be willing to confront the world's worst human rights violators. Churches must not allow the desire for "peacemaking" with those violators to silence their witness to the sufferings of the victims.

Churches should have a strategic sense of the importance of human rights advocacy in "partly free" nations. These are cases in which a certain degree of political and religious freedom might allow indigenous Christians to speak publicly in a limited way, if their U.S. and Western partners back them up. Sometimes such foreign solidarity might tip the balance toward significantly greater freedom in those countries.

Churches must become more balanced in their approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their credibility as mediators depends upon the perception of fairness. Churches must learn how to address human rights abuses in the Muslim and Arab world, including abuses by the Palestinian Authority. And they must take seriously the continuing problem of anti-Semitism.

*This article is a summary of a special IRD report entitled "Human Rights Advocacy in the Mainline Protestant Churches (2000-2003)." You may obtain an electronic copy of that report on the IRD website at [www.ird-renew.org](http://www.ird-renew.org). A paper copy may be ordered for \$5 by contacting the IRD office.*

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## UNITED METHODISM'S INCONSISTENCY ON ISSUES OF LIFE

By Peter R. McGuire

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As with every General Conference since the 1960s, the 2004 proceedings included petitions from around the world addressing the issues of abortion and capital punishment. Both liberal and conservative members of the denomination attempted to mold the current Resolutions and Discipline to fit their various agendas. Abortion rights activists attempted to protect the current pro-choice statement, while pro-life activists attempted to change the permissiveness of the existing statement. Regarding the issue of capital punishment, most petitions attempted to strengthen the denomination's opposition to the practice.

Herein lies the problem we have as United Methodists. We do not have, what Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Bernardin called, a "Consistent Ethic of Life." In 1984, Bernardin sought to explain the interrelatedness of life issues through the overarching principle that God is the creator of all life. His analogy was that of a tapestry in which abortion, protection of civilians in times of war, the cessation of the death penalty, the protection of the elderly, and the protection of the handicapped were all part of the same cause. As United Methodists, we are not consistent in the principles undergirding our social activism. For example, in our Book of Discipline's ironically titled section, "The Nurturing Community," one finds the following:

"The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when, and even whether, new individuals will be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy" (Para. 161.J; emphasis mine).

Here we find two incompatible statements. While professing "belief" that God is the giver of life, we tacitly encourage the exercise of a procedure that ends the work God has done. This is incomprehensible considering our "profession of faith" in the first line that God is the giver of life. This is a position repeated in Resolution #90 ("New Developments in Genetic Science"). There, we state that "Creation has its origin, existence, value, and destiny in God," and that it "has been declared 'good' by the Creator." Does this inform our decisions? No, for in another resolution left unchanged by General Conference 2004, we shamelessly declare some children "unacceptable." This is a chilling statement reminiscent of such famous eugenics advocates as Margaret Sanger (founder of Planned Parenthood) and Dr. Joseph Mengele (the famous "angel of death" in Auschwitz).

Consider the deeply disturbing Resolution #22, unaltered by this year's General Conference. "As developing technologies have moved...reproduction more...closely to the realm of responsible choice, the decision whether or not to give birth to children must include acceptance of the responsibility to provide for their mental, physical, and spiritual growth, as well as consideration of the possible effect on quality of life for family and society."

One could translate this passage as follows: If your baby will not be perfect, if it will affect your financial goals for yourself and spouse, and if it will be too much of a responsibility, then your best decision is to remove this impending "burden" for the sake of yourself and society.

This ill-conceived advice reveals another inconsistency with United Methodism's position on issues of life. On one hand, Para. 162.G of the Discipline states that United Methodists "recognize and affirm the full humanity...of all individuals with disabilities (and)...their rightful place in both the church and society." On the other hand, we are encouraging parents to spare themselves the struggle of raising children who might have a negative effect on a family's quality of life because of "mental" or "physical" challenges.

We have begun to measure the value of human life by a sliding scale of temporal standards for happiness and "social good." It seems that we have convinced ourselves with all of our modern technology and the ability to determine ahead of time if a child is worth bearing or not. It seems that we think it okay to one day have a world where only "beauty queens, Mensa I.Q.'s, and athletes will remain," as Muggeridge observed. Gone, however, as he put it, "in this world without tears, will be the Christian vision of a mankind whose loving Father is God and the symbolism of a stricken body, nailed to a cross" as a symbol of hope.

Consider our Resolution statement on population control (#146), where we describe a world with too many “unacceptable” people: “Hunger and poverty, injustice and violence in the world, cannot simplistically be blamed on population growth, yet the rapidly swelling numbers of humankind are making it increasingly difficult to solve the other interconnected problems. There is much we do not yet know about the relationship between population size and the sustaining environment, but clearly, we do know there can be too many people....The church supports population programs as needed to move toward its goal of a just and humane world order.” Notice the difference, though, when we describe in the same Resolution #146 the ideal world in which a proper number of people without disabilities are in charge:

“We welcome the growing understanding of what just and desirable means for lowering fertility rates may encompass, and we affirm that the use of such means must take into consideration the critical importance and interrelated nature of these aspects: better education and the opportunity for people to participate in decisions that shape their lives; the provision of basic economic security, including old-age security; upgrading the status of women; improved maternal and child health care; and finally, a strong birth-control program.”

What a difference genetic selection makes! What are you to do if you find out that your baby might have a birth defect? Well, according to Resolution #22, a “mature Christian” woman will recognize the “wisdom” of abortion when confronted with an “unacceptable” pregnancy. Where is hope? Where is faith in God’s blessings of strength and courage?

Let us recognize that no family would willingly choose to have a handicapped or deformed child. Still, few after birth would eliminate the child’s presence from their lives simply because it is not pristine. Furthermore, they would probably tell you that they would not want to deprive either themselves or their children the basics of human experience that they encounter each day: pleasure, sadness, love, and hope.

Still, we do not hesitate to make such perverse recommendations. Why is this? It appears that our primary measure for a quality life is the ever-tenuous standard of economic and physical expediency. What is best right now? In basing our positions on such a fleeting standard, we not only abandon historic church tradition, but also the teachings of our founder, John Wesley, who, when reflecting on the exercise of power, asked, “Where is the justice of inflicting...evils on those that have done us no wrong? Of depriving those that never injured us in word or deed...?”

In each of Wesley’s comments on abortion, he considered it an act of murder to be avoided at all cost. Can the same be said of his views on capital punishment? Unfortunately, no, as it appears that he never made a statement on either side of the issue.

In our current Discipline however, in paragraph 164.A, we make one of our few unambiguous stands. We declare, “The mistreatment or torture of persons by governments for any purpose violates Christian teaching and must be condemned and/or opposed by Christians and churches....For the same reason, we oppose capital punishment and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.”

The significance of this is that it is consistent with a belief that human life should begin and end with God. Our position is similar to that of the Catholic Church’s, which is that the government should pursue methods other than execution for punishing violent and dangerous criminals.

In recent years, anti-death penalty activists have had their cause bolstered by the rising tide of DNA evidence freeing death row inmates wrongly convicted of crimes they did not commit. Dozens have been freed over the past five years, proving that many were probably innocent when executed.

The problem is, if innocence is our standard for the preservation of life, how can we encourage abortion? Furthermore, it seems that if we are interested in saving the greatest number of lives, then we are investing ourselves wrongly in the issues. After all, as of April 2004, 44 million abortions have been performed in the United States since 1973, whereas 60,000 executions have been carried out since 1968. The numbers seem to indicate that our priorities are misplaced.

To speak with authority, we must be consistent in our support of all life, whether unborn or elderly, whether handicapped or guilty of crime. If we are to engage society with any sense of moral authority as a denomination, we

must begin to rethink over the next four years our positions on all issues relating the value of human life, so that all begin with the same foundation: that “Creation has its origin, existence, value, and destiny in God.”

This is the position eloquently advocated by Pope John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical “The Gospel of Life.” He wrote “a new cultural climate is developing...which gives crimes against life a new and—if possible—even more sinister character.” What were these crimes?

“Any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, violates the integrity of the human person...(including) subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society, and...harm...those who practice them. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator.”

Later, John Paul II would argue that capital punishment was a form of murder, saying that it was not necessary so long as “bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor.” He then called on public authorities to seek out “bloodless” methods of protecting the public, as they “correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.”

For most of us, especially in a post 9/11 world, there is a big difference between defending the right to life of a baby in the womb and the life of a person convicted of murder or terrorism. Within the worldview of “The Gospel of Life,” however, there is no difference, as capital punishment is not necessary for the defense of a nation or the innocent. Incarceration and isolation for life are enough. While our statement condemning capital punishment places us within the confines of the Pope’s “culture of life,” our abortion rights stand prevents us from remaining there. For while Resolution #231 on Capital Punishment states that we believe “no...human life can be taken humanely by the state,” we do not state that it is inhumane to abort babies in the womb. John Paul’s delineation of the boundaries of “life” versus “death” provides us a starting point with which to re-evaluate our social principles as a denomination. If we do not find consistency in our positions, we have no credibility in either the “culture of life” or the “culture of death.”

Cardinal Bernardin eloquently argued for a consistent ethic of life. He wrote that: “The case for a consistent ethic of life—one which stands for the protection of the right to life and the promotion of the rights which enhance life from womb to tomb—manifests the positive potential of the Catholic moral and social tradition. It is both a complex and a demanding tradition; it joins the humanity of the unborn infant and the humanity of the hungry; it calls for positive legal action to prevent the killing of the unborn or the aged and positive societal action to provide shelter for the homeless and education for the illiterate. The potential of the moral and social vision is appreciated in a new way when the systemic vision of Catholic ethics is seen as the background for the specific positions we take on a range of issues.”

His point is that we begin enhancing a person’s quality of life when we seek to protect his or her right to life. Furthermore, he argued that it is not enough to protect the baby while it is in the womb. We must do more. We must care for it when it has emerged into the world in whatever condition nature has determined. A.J. Dyck put it best when he wrote, “The moral question for us is not whether the suffering and dying are persons, but whether we are the kind of persons who will care for them without doubting their worth.”

Our challenge is to seek credibility, not through politically advantageous statements, but through a relevant, consistent stand for the value of God’s work in creation, and through the protection of human life in all its forms. To do this, we must reevaluate our positions on a variety of issues, including healthcare, family, population, criminal justice, and medicine. The consequences may be that we change many of our current positions grounded on nothing more than political expediency, yet the result will once again be a return to relevance and integrity. Can we repair the tapestry of our social principles, and stand firmly on the belief that God is the “author of all life?” This is the question that lies before us.

*Peter R. McGuire is currently serving the Salem-Epworth United Methodist Churches in Mount Airy, NC and Cana, VA. He was the assistant editor for the Frederick Herzog reader, entitled “Theology from the Belly of the Whale” and the author of “The Fruit of the Vine, a History of Methodism in the Piedmont.”*

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## EVANGELISM BEGINS AT HOME

Deborah Botham

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As I write this, my big old orange cat is sitting under the bird feeder, completely oblivious to what is going on above him. The chickadees dart to and from the feeder, either oblivious to or willfully ignoring the silly cat. Once again, God pokes me hard enough that I see myself, and the church, both in the actions of the cat, and in the confidence of the birds.

Let's take a few sentences, however, and lay out the results of a surprising poll conducted last week by Newsweek/Beliefnet. More than 1,000 adults, 18 years or older, were given the question: "Can a good person who isn't of your religious faith go to heaven or attain salvation, or not?" Sixty-eight percent of the evangelical Christians said yes. The Newsweek cover story that evolved from the survey concluded, "Americans have become so focused on a very personal style of worship (forging a direct relationship with God) that spiritual experience has begun to supplant dogma, or teaching based on the authority of the Bible.

Now, back to the cat, completely oblivious. Every Sunday morning, in hundreds of churches across America, we pray and praise and worship. We also assume that everyone "gets it", that Jesus Christ is the only way, truth and life that leads to salvation. Assumptions are deadly, and slowly but surely, right under our noses, Jesus Christ is being excised from Christianity. He's someone to be imitated, surely, but the only way to salvation? Well, what about all those nice people who do good things but have not accepted Christ as their Savior? Surely, God wouldn't let them out.

Several years ago, right after Josh McDowell published *Beyond Beliefs to Convictions*, I heard a radio interview in which he explained that so many of us answer the "why" questions, with "Well, because that's what my mom and dad believed." But how many of us can truly back up our beliefs with the Biblical proof? It's one thing to rely on faith; it's quite another to know the Scriptures so well that we can point to the place where "God says ...".

Sunday School classes tackle themes and issues, but perhaps it's time to get back to the basics. Just what does it mean to be a Christian? What do Christians believe, and why? And where is the evidence for our beliefs? In my own church, there have been occasions where the Muslim faith entered into the discussion. A number of group members believe quite vehemently that the god of Islam and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Moses are the same. To believe otherwise, they reason, is to denigrate one religion and elevate the other. The adolescent in me wants to let out a Homer Simpson style, "Duh".

We cannot take for granted that every person in the pew is a Christian. He or she may go to church every Sunday, attend every small group, serve valiantly on committees, feed the homeless, clothe the poor, and fight for the oppressed. Worthy activities, each and every one. But no matter how just the cause, or how generous the heart, there is one requirement and one requirement alone for salvation – believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the way, the only way, to eternal salvation and fellowship with God.

Now I haven't forgotten my English rules – if you introduce an example in the first paragraph, you'd better get back to it somewhere in the article. Time for the birds – confidently, gloriously they take nourishment, even though the cat waits below. Let us feed boldly on the Word of God, and, not afraid of rejection, bring up the hard questions and His answers. Evangelism begins at home, and Sunday School is the perfect place to start.

***"I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both to the doctrine, Spirit and discipline with which they first set out." - John Wesley***

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## RECENT BOOKS ON CHRISTIANITY AND RENEWAL

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### **Wesleyan Essentials in a Multicultural Society, Ted A. Campbell and Michael T. Burns, Abingdon Press, Copyright 2005**

We are challenged to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints in the context of a multicultural society. It is a daunting challenge. Beliefs we once thought universal, and authorities (like the Bible) to which we once appealed as givens, cannot be taken for granted. It is also an exciting challenge. Christ has called us to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

This book considers the challenge of contending for the Christian faith and for the historic Wesleyan mission in the context of contemporary, multicultural society. *Wesleyan Essentials in a Multicultural Society* features 13 lessons, each with discussion questions designed for Sunday school or small group use. Prompted by a large number of requests from pastors and Sunday schools, this resource (co-published with Bristol House) will help users understand United Methodist beliefs and tradition and what it means to function as a Christian in the context of a multi-cultural society. Thirteen sessions will cover the failure of post-modern philosophy to provide ultimate value outside of Christian faith, as well as the Wesleyan essentials of original sin, the saving work of Christ, atonement, resurrection, salvation by grace through faith, trinity, prevenient grace, sanctifying grace, doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and living a transformed life.

### **Loving God, Loving Others, The Jesus Creed, Scot McKnight, Paraclete Press, Copyright 2004**

This groundbreaking book explains and illustrates what spiritual formation meant to Jesus. Many of the spiritual masters that we look to today offer great insights on various aspects of the Christian faith journey. Their words speak to us of union with God, transformation, and purpose. But behind these worthy goals stands Jesus, shaped himself by the ancient Jewish creed for spiritual formation, the Shema. This creed commands Israel to love God with heart, soul, and strength.

During his lifetime, Jesus amended that creed of Judaism and so gave his followers a creed for spiritual formation: they are to love God with heart, soul, and strength, and to love others as themselves. In this practical, story-filled, witty, and illuminating book, Scot McKnight, professor of religious studies at North Park University in Chicago, gives Christians an excellent introduction to Christian spirituality. Its pages glow with compassion, generosity and the invitation to understand what was important to Jesus and what is crucial for Christianity.

### **LifeLine, Sharing Christ in a Broken World, Edited by Steve Beard, Maggie Schroeder, The Good News Renewal Collection, Living Streams Publications, Copyright 2003**

Jesus said, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." Of all famous last words, these words from Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Mark are the only ones in history to carry with them the weight of redemption and eternal hope. For more than 2000 years, believers have tried to find ways to obey the charge-some doing it well and many doing it badly.

This collection of articles draws together men and women from a variety of perspectives with the one aim to winsomely and effectively live and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Contributors to this book range from the Archbishop of Canterbury to an Australian biker evangelist to a Hollywood screenwriter and virtually every vocation in between. This book will inspire and encourage you to follow Christ's challenge and call upon your life. It contains contributions by: George L. Carey • Andrea Nasfell, Nicky Gumbel, Dick Staub, Amy L. Sherman, George G. Hunter III, John Smith, Steve Sjogren, Stephen Charles Mott, Mark Rutland, Chris Heuertz, Edward L. Tullis, Kathleen K. Rutledge, Al Vom Steeg, Bill Ury, Larry D. Reesor, Rob Frost.

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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**

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**