
RENEWAL



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AN APPEAL TO LEADERSHIP

By Rob Renfroe

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20).

Our church is in a time of listening. Our bishops have called for a time of dialogue that they and all United Methodists hope and pray will lead to true unity. James tells us that we should be swift to listen and slow to speak. In other words, listening is important. It’s what you need to do first, if a dialogue is going to be beneficial.

Even if the Bible didn’t emphasize the importance of listening, I think we could discern its value by looking at the human body God created. Perhaps the design illustrates that listening well is twice as important and twice as difficult as speaking. To listen well you need two ears: one to hear what’s being said and one to hear what’s not being said; one to hear the words that are being spoken and one to hear the emotions beneath the words. And in the dialogue the church is now having, we will need one ear to listen to each other and one ear to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Although I am a member of the National Board of the Confessing Movement, we’re not given a script to use or a party line to promote. Still I think I understand and represent evangelical Wesleyan Christians in the United Methodist Church. And if I may be so bold, I think I know what we want the rest of the church to hear.

First, we are not part of evangelical reform movements because we are angry with our church, but because we love it; not because we want to tear it down, but because we want to build it up; not because we want to divide it, but because we want to unite it.

We, clergy and laity, who are calling the church to doctrinal integrity are doing so because the church we love has been drifting from its biblical center and its Wesleyan core. We believe the gift God gave the world through John Wesley is holy and precious, and that this gift must be protected, nurtured, and renewed.

Second, we do not believe that homosexuality is the issue that is dividing the church. That would be like saying that the primary issue facing a patient with a staff infection is his fever. I wish homosexuality was the issue that divided the church. It would be enough. But it’s not. The divide runs much deeper than our differences regarding sexual practice and it centers on four key issues.

1. The Nature of Moral Truth. Is moral truth determined by the unchanging character of God? Or is it determined by the ever-changing experiences of human beings? Does the character of God determine what is right and wrong? Or do we conduct surveys and decide that if a certain percentage of persons in a given culture engage in a particular behavior, it can’t be wrong. Some say it must be natural and good, even a gift from God to be celebrated.

Our African brothers and sisters were told on the floor of General Conference in Pittsburgh: “Obviously homosexuality is more of a problem in some cultures than it is in others.” The implication was clear: the practice of homosexuality is

not the same kind of problem for those of us who are more enlightened, and it won't be for the Africans when they have progressed and matured our way. Interestingly, those who were patronizing and dismissive toward our developing world brothers and sisters at General Conference were not conservatives, but liberals.

Evangelicals believe that moral truth is determined by who God is and what he has done, not by who we are or by what we do. And because we are fallen in our actions and in our thinking, we do not believe that we will discern moral truth solely by the power of our intellect or by behavior and deciding that if enough of us do something, it must be ok.

As the Scriptures say, "There is a way that seems right, but in the end it leads to death." It is possible to believe sincerely that something is right and good; but, in reality, it leads us away from the God of life and truth. We believe God determines what is true. And for us to know that truth, it must be revealed.

2. The authority of the Scriptures. Do the Scriptures speak truth to all people in all cultures at all times? Or were they wrong when they were written, culturally determined in their declarations, and hopelessly out of date for persons enlightened by the truth contained in the latest sociological surveys?

At General Conference in 1988 a United Methodist pastor spoke in favor of changing the current language in the Discipline. In a moment of honesty, he explained why he felt comfortable with his position by stating, "We don't go back to the Bible for the last word on anything." Though few are so open about their willingness to dismiss the authority of Scripture for faith and practice, this man is not alone.

Writing in *Open Hands*, the Rev. Tom Griffith, pastor of a Reconciling congregation, wrote: "Now it's our turn to get honest. Although the creeds of our denomination pay lip service to the idea that scripture is 'authoritative' and 'sufficient for faith and practice,' many of us have moved far beyond that notion in our own theological thinking. We are only deceiving ourselves—and lying to our evangelical brothers and sisters—when we deny the shift we have made... We have moved far beyond the idea that the Bible is exclusively normative and literally authoritative for our faith. To my thinking, that is good! What is bad is that we have tried to con ourselves and others by saying, 'we haven't changed our position.'"

Though I differ with him, I say hooray for Tom Griffith's honesty and willingness to talk about the deep issues that must be resolved if unity is to be a possibility for our church.

Evangelicals are well aware that there are parts of Scripture that are difficult to interpret. We do not claim infallibility in our understanding of the Bible. And we humbly and gladly admit that we need the counsel of the entire body of Christ rightly to divide the Word of truth. We need the witness of the historic Church and we need the insights of our contemporaries, those who agree with us and those who do not.

However, we do not believe that the Scriptures merely point to the Word of God or merely contain the Word of God. We believe they are the Word of God. We believe the Scriptures are more than the witness of godly men and women to God. We believe they are God's witness to us. That means if the Bible contains it, it's not our job to correct it. If the Bible teaches it, it's not our prerogative to twist it. And if the Bible states it clearly and consistently, we don't need the latest copy of *Psychology Today*, or this morning's Gallup Poll or some pontificator of political properness to tell us why the Bible got it wrong and what enlightened folk, today's new Gnostics, know to be true.

We choose to stand under the authority of the Bible, not over the authority of the Bible. And we will not sacrifice truth for the sake of unity; because we know that if we do, we will end up with neither.

3. The revelatory work of the Holy Spirit. Is the revelatory work always in accordance with the Scriptures? Or can the Spirit amend and even contradict the Scriptures?

Even the most conservative Christians believe that it is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to illumine the Scriptures, reveal more of its meaning, and show us how to apply the eternal Word of God to the issues of our contemporary time and culture. But liberals, at least the more radical ones, go much further than that. They believe that the living Christ not only offers new insights into the Scriptures, but that he also corrects, amends, and even contradicts it. As one retired elder in our annual conference said to me, "The church created the Scriptures so we can recreate them."

This is where the battle will be fought in the coming years. Did the church create the Scriptures and therefore now has every right to recreate the Word of God? Evangelicals do not believe that the church created the Scriptures. We believe the church received the Scriptures. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, (and yes it was a messy process) the church recognized what God gave to his people to be the canon, the measuring stick by which all claims of spiritual and moral truth are to be tested and judged. And we believe God is consistent. He is true to his nature and he is true to his Word. And we believe he got it right the first time.

When God revealed his Word in the Old Testament, he was not in his spiritual infancy. When he revealed his Word in the New Testament, he was not in his spiritual adolescence. And we do not believe that now 2000 years later, now that God's all grown up, he has finally determined what he really believes and is ready to amend his former writings. Yes, God does new things. Of course, the Holy Spirit has new insights for the people of God. But they will always be consistent with what he has revealed in the past.

4. The uniqueness of Christ. Do we confess him as the only-begotten Son of God, the unique Savior of the world, and the supreme Lord of the universe? Or can he be particularized to our experiences, relativized for a Western culture, and trivialized into just one of many ways to God? To confess "Jesus is Lord" is to affirm nothing less than the absolute uniqueness of our Christ in a world which is full of cosmic competitors.

In our regional jurisdiction we interview episcopal candidates. It's a good process. Candidates respond in writing to our questions. We review their responses, and then we have an hour of dialogue with each one. One candidate was asked about the importance of witnessing. He responded that some of his students did not feel comfortable telling others about their faith. He stated they feel that to do so is "religious and cultural imperialism." He continued, "But I tell them that they can tell others about their faith; simply because a man says to his wife, 'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,' it does not mean that other wives are not sunshine for their husbands." I raised my hand and asked, "Are you saying that in the same way Jesus brings light and truth into our lives, other religious leaders do the same for others." "Yes," he answered. I pressed him, "So when we say that Jesus is the Savior of the world, really we are saying that he is the Savior of our worlds." Again the answer was affirmative. And then he said: "God is wholesale. Jesus is retail."

Let me translate for you. God is Tommy Hilfiger. And you can get him at Jesus J. C. Penney or Buddha Bloomingdales or Muhammed Macy's. It doesn't matter where you get Tommy Hilfiger, it's still Tommy. And it doesn't matter where you get God, any retail outlet in the mall of truth will do. The good news is that this candidate was not elected to the Episcopacy. The bad news is that he is a professor at one of our UM seminaries, teaching men and women how to preach the gospel and save the lost. Is Jesus just one of many—one of many guides, one of many lights, one of many teachers, one of many sources to be considered as we determine the truth about God, the nature of reality, and morality?

When you talk about Jesus, you are talking about the one who suffered thirty-nine lashes, his back torn apart with a cato'-nine-tails studded with bone and glass and metal, and then nailed to a cross to die the most painful and shameful death the Roman Empire could devise. And he did so, so our sins could be forgiven. So our hearts could be changed. So the curtain would be torn in two and we could walk into the presence of God washed in his blood and holy in the Father's sight. When you talk about Jesus, you are talking about our Lord and our love and our life. And there is no treasure, threat, promise, or power that can cause us to deny a single word that the Scriptures teach about who he is or what he has done for us. He is not one of many guides. He is not one of many voices. He is not one of many teachers. He is not my sunshine. He is the sunshine. He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life. He is the one who reconciles a sinful world and my sinful soul to God. He is not one of many. He is the one and only.

These are the four issues that divide and disturb United Methodism. These are not small matters that can be ignored or denied for the sake of unity. They must be addressed or true unity will be impossible.

The whole church

We will not be made whole by singing "bless be the tie that binds" every four years on the last day of General Conference. I wish that would work, but it won't. We won't be made whole by denying our differences with nearly

unanimous votes that proclaim our unity of mission when large segments of the church are committed to breaking the covenant that holds us together. Such votes, like a couple of aspirin, may make us feel better for the moment but they do not bring long-term health and wholeness. We won't be made whole by people misquoting and misusing Wesley's sermon on "Catholic Spirit" to buttress their view that beliefs don't matter. We will not be made whole by a listening process when some of those appointed to listen go to Lake Junaluska and tell a pro-gay gathering, "We believe you're right and those that disagree with you are wrong, and nothing the other side can say will make us change our minds," and then they turn to us and say, "We're ready to hear you." That kind of listening creates more than a little mistrust on our part.

We will not be made whole by institutional responses by company men and women, regardless if they are called bishops, district superintendents or pastors, because what we are facing is more than an institutional problem. Quite frankly, we won't be made whole by getting the language right in the Discipline. What we are facing is more than a language problem. Unfortunately, getting the right judicial decisions won't make us whole either. What we are facing is not a judicial problem. The people called United Methodist are facing a spiritual problem and we need our leaders to provide spiritual solutions. We are facing the most important doctrinal issues that any church can face and we need our leaders to guard the faith and give doctrinal answers.

The problem we are facing is a question of faithfulness and we need our leaders to give a response that worries less about being inclusive of every view and worries more about being faithful to the Scriptures. In the past, some of our leaders have acted as if they are charged with accommodating the faith instead of contending for the faith. We have had leaders who accept every view no matter how radical. And because they do, they call themselves Christ-like, instead of guarding the gospel and having the church call them trustworthy.

Some of our leaders seem to believe that they cannot take a stand or speak out on the controversial issues of the day because they represent the whole church. The new mantra is that they must represent all views because they are bishops of the whole church. But for that very reason they must speak—and they must speak the message of the church. They do represent the church—the whole church. They represent the church in Africa that has told us that if we change the traditional morality of the Scriptures, we will eviscerate their ability to speak to a continent that is being courted and intimidated by the ideology of Islam. If our leaders represent the whole church, surely they know this means they represent the historic church with its 2000 years of teaching and tradition. They stand in the line of the apostles and have been given the charge and granted the authority to guard the faith.

You never save a troubled institution by refusing to talk about what's wrong. You save an institution by doing what's right. You don't save a hurting institution by maintaining the status quo. You save an institution by changing its present dysfunctional reality. And as important as they are, you don't make a divided church whole simply by listening or ultimately through dialogue. You must at some point provide courageous and, if need be, costly leadership that others will follow.

Like a good counselor, the one thing our leaders must not do is ignore our deepest issues or act as if they do not matter. They must lead us to those issues and they must speak truth to the Church so that with a unified voice we will speak truth to the culture that the world may believe. We can be grateful that a number of the church's leaders have recognized the deeper issues that divide us, and some have been willing to address those issues publicly. We have been praying for such voices and we are thankful that they have arisen. Please, continue to speak clearly and courageously. We are listening. And if you lead, we will follow.

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CHRISTIAN PATRIOTISM

Rev. Gregory P. Ciesluk

Can a Christian be a patriotic American? The faithful have struggled with such a question. The answer is two-fold. A Christian's first allegiance is to God in Christ and God's kingdom. Yet, since God has appointed our lives to live in America, we are called to love our country by partnering with God to bring his kingdom to bear in our land. In this article, I try to help people embrace a balanced position of living in two kingdoms, a heavenly one and an earthly one and challenge them to be partners with God in His work by fulfilling their patriotic duties.

This past July 4, we again commemorated our country's founding and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Our founding document declared our nation's identity as separate and independent from England and the stirring bedrock conviction firmly grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all [men] are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them being the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

To mark this important historical moment in our nation's history, parades, picnics, and firework display were held all over the land. Among the many places where the fourth was so marked was my hometown of Chelmsford, MA, through which troops marched en-route to Lexington and Concord in the Revolutionary War. As a boy, our family was always among the crowds that gathered for the parades. I remember, even as a boy, that I would become somewhat choked up as the military and civic groups processed up North Road toward Chelmsford center and the bands played "You're a Grand Old Flag", "America the Beautiful", and other patriotic tunes. For years in my childhood, the beginning of the school day was ritualized with the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." In church, the previous Sunday we would sing a patriotic hymn. Before every baseball game, the crowds and the players would stand, hand/ hat over their heart, and organist and/ or a soloist would sing the National Anthem. This all seemed right in the mind of a young boy – Christian faith and American patriotism were perfectly compatible with each other.

But as I grew up, something changed. I don't know exactly how it happened and exactly when it happened, but I began to feel somewhat ambivalent about expressing American patriotism. Somewhere, I began to internally question whether the affections of my youth were compatible with my growing Christian faith. As I matured, it became apparent that being a committed Christian disciple and a patriotic American was not the same thing. As faith in Christ became more central in my identity and the primary source of direction for my life, subtly I began to minimize my devotion to my country. Somehow, expressing devotion to country seemed out of place, perhaps even inappropriate.

By this time, the media began to subtly indoctrinate me in its "America as a deeply flawed nation." With my eyes opened to the immorality in our nation, its various social problems, and its growing secularism, the media's message seemed to be an accurate assessment. In my seminary education at Duke Divinity School, I was warned about the excesses of American patriotism and was challenged about the appropriateness of patriotism, particularly its expression in Christian worship. Wanting to be faithful to God and being somewhat impressionable to the authority figures in my schooling, the pendulum continued to swing to an extreme.

I remember early in my first pastoral appointment in the heartland of the Midwest in Ohio, I was embarrassed as patriotic affections and religion were inseparably linked during the first Gulf War. I endured it and did not say a word to anyone. Later in the same year, I became aware of a seminary friend being caught in the crossfire of this issue. During one of his first Sundays, he was taken by surprise as the American flag was unfurled in the midst of Sunday worship. The congregation rose to its feet as expression of devotion to the country and her flag, but my friend, schooled well in the conflict of religion and patriotism, remained seated. For doing so, he paid a heavy price.

So what did I do? How did I reconcile these things? In terms of my pastoral practice, I pretty much ignored patriotic themes and avoided patriotic music in worship.

Then September 11th happened. Our nation was attacked in its preeminent city in New York and in the nation's Capitol and the issue was reopened for me. As stories of heroism were told and America ideals were extolled openly again, I began to reconsider my thoughts and the pendulum began to swing back toward the center. I began to ask

anew an important question: “Can a person be a committed Christian and a patriotic American at the same time? What I learned was the question I and other Americans were asking afresh had been asked by Christian faithful in many generations past.

Patriotism used to be a simple matter. Most of America's traditions were rooted in a Christian heritage. To be a good Christian seemed to be synonymous with being a good American. And no wonder. Through most of our history as a nation, Christianity was the dominant religion. At independence, the Founding Fathers declared a national day of prayer and thanksgiving—a holiday we still celebrate.

From that time on, many states required the Christian religion to be taught in colleges, prisons, and orphanages. Up to the 1960s, many states required Bible reading and prayers in the public schools. Textbooks referred to God without embarrassment. Almost all Americans agreed that our law was rooted, as John Adams said, in a common moral and religious tradition stretching back to Moses on Mount Sinai. In a culture like this, it was easy for a Christian to be a patriot. Perhaps, too easy. In this context, vibrant biblical faith was often watered down into mere civil religion, where the well-being of the country was often equated with the expansion of God's Kingdom and patriotic affections were equated with devotion to Jesus Christ.

But today, the dominant culture is no longer Christian. Most of our cultural and intellectual leaders seem to reject traditional values and are highly critical of institutions of American life—especially its religious values and institutions. Following their influence, we've experienced a growing decline in and hostility toward traditional moral norms. And now, we have related social problems to be solved and the issues to be debated that often pit Americans of different worldviews against other Americans. The waters tend to get very muddy.

So what of Christian patriotism? The Christian position is beautifully balanced. On one hand, we don't make an idol of our country, that is, make it equal with God. We don't wrap the flag around the cross. We take great pains to remember that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, and that's where our ultimate allegiance is. In my growing up years, the liturgy of the Church for the reception of new members stated it this way: “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and pledge allegiance to his kingdom?”

On the other hand, we believe, “God so loved the world...” and so we are called to love the world in His name. But, of course, that's utterly impractical. No finite human being could possibly love six billion other people. So God has placed us in concrete relationships in one corner of the world where we can learn to love. As Augustine put it, it's as though God had cast lots and assigned each one of us to a particular family, church, and country. We are to pay "special regard" to those around us, being godly citizens of whatever kingdom we are in.

You see, the only place for expressing our allegiance to Christ is in the concrete loyalties God calls us to here on earth—including loyalty to country. We can't love the human family in the abstract; we can only really love people in the particular, concrete relationships in which God placed us in—our family, our church, our community... and our nation.

It's a tough balancing act. In response, we Christians cannot withdraw from the world and pretend we are somehow dwelling in heaven now; nor can we uncritically embrace an often sinful world. In a sense, we live, as St. Augustine put it, in two cities. He taught how we can reconcile our dual citizenship- first in heaven and secondly on earth, in our God-appointed place on earth, in particular.

His teaching beautifully captures the essence of Christian responsibility within the state. On the one hand, we are to be the best of citizens, because we do out of the love of God what others do only by force of law. On the other hand, we are careful to not make our devotion to our country an idol as if America is God. Our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, so that's where our ultimate allegiance is squarely to be.

In a relevant gospel lesson, Jesus and his disciples chose to go through the land of the Samaritan to share the gospel of the kingdom in word and deed (Lk 9:51-62). They could have avoided Samaria all together, predicting a lack of receptivity to Jesus and his message. Jesus' face firmly set toward Jerusalem was an offense to the prejudices of Samaritans. But Jesus' disciples went there to prepare the way for Jesus' message and ministry. In the same way, we

are called, in the midst of an unbelieving people and at times, a unreceptive culture, to proclaim the kingdom of God and be partners with God in transforming the culture.

For the Christian, patriotism covers all of life, modeling good citizenship. It's serving in the military, voting in elections, serving on juries. It's honoring and supporting our authorities who serve the common good and our elected leaders who, in their governing, bring order to our lives. But it is more than this. It's also shoveling snow off the porch of an elderly neighbor or taking a casserole to a family that just welcomed a new baby. It's volunteering in our community and looking out for the neighbors' kids -- and it's letting your voice be heard or perhaps demonstrating when injustice, corruption or immorality is occurring and the common good is threatened. It's being actively engaged in the political and legislative processes. It's bringing the ethical wisdom of the Bible and the Christian tradition to bear in our public policy debates in our nation, state, and communities. It's being in touch with our political leaders and expressing our faith-informed views.

Sometimes, politically correct voices will tell us we are trying to "impose our beliefs on society." We are warned about the need for "the separation of church and state," lest America become a theocracy. Charles J. Chaput is the archbishop of Roman Catholic Diocese of Denver contends that these are two of the emptiest slogans in current American politics, intended to discourage serious debate. He claims that no one in mainstream American politics wants a theocracy nor doubts the importance of morality in public life. He believes, therefore, we should recognize these slogans for what they are: frequently dishonest and ultimately dangerous sound bites. I tend to agree. Lawmaking inevitably involves some group imposing its beliefs on the rest of us. That's the nature of the democratic process. If we say that we "ought" to do something, we are making a moral judgment. When our legislators turn that judgment into law, somebody's "ought" becomes a "must" for the whole of society. This is not inherently dangerous. It is how pluralistic society works.

Democracy depends on people of conviction expressing their views, confidently and without embarrassment. This give-and-take is an American tradition, and religious believers play a vital role in it. We don't serve our country - in fact we weaken it intellectually - if we downplay our principles or fail to speak forcefully out of some misguided sense of good manners.

Christians have an obligation to work for the common good and the dignity of every person and bring the resources of our faith to bear in the issues of our day: abortion, euthanasia, cloning, stem cell research, death penalty, same-sex marriage, adoption, poverty, immigration, education, religious freedom, war on terrorism.

The list could go on and on. Ultimately, words are cheap. It's action that matters. If we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," then we must also act as partners with God in bring God's will to pass on earth as it is already done in heaven. Christian patriotism implies that we fight, ethically and nonviolently, for what we believe is in the common good best interest for our nation. Claiming that "we don't want to impose our beliefs on society" is simply politically convenient, morally incoherent, and ultimately irresponsible.

Can a Christian be a patriotic American? Yes. Love for God and love for country are not incompatible, yet require discipline and balance. Patriotism, fulfilling our civic responsibilities, is one way that we are called to fulfill our discipleship. Our first allegiance is to God, even as we recognize our loyalty to the nation in which the Lord has appointed us to live out our earthly days. And so, with these loyalties firmly ordered in mind, we pray fervently and partner with God by working ceaselessly that God's kingdom may come on earth even as it is in heaven.

This article is based on a sermon recently preached by Rev. Gregory Ciesluk. Rev. Ciesluk, is an Elder in the Minnesota Annual Conference, and pastor of Norton Park UMC, Duluth, MN and Northwood UMC, Esko, MN. Much of the source material comes from the work of Charles Colson and his Breakpoint commentaries. You may find daily Breakpoint commentaries as well as an archive of past commentaries at www.breakpoint.org.

A PRAYER GUIDE

Robbin R. Grill



Have you ever wanted a simple reminder about how to pray and how not to forget important things to pray for and about? The above prayer hand was developed by the Navigators and is a wonderful tool to guide us in our daily prayer lives.

As we come before the Lord, the index finger reminds us to thank God for what He has done for us; for all the many blessings bestowed upon us. Ephesians 5:20 tells us: “And you will always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Intercessory prayer is how we raise our concerns for others to God. Prayer is powerful and when many band together to pray the results are astounding. Ephesians 6:18-19 says “Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere. And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words as I boldly explain God’s secret plan that the Good News is for the Gentiles, too.”

We must not forget to ask God for our own needs. Jesus told us to ask for anything. We need not worry that God will not want to hear; He is anxious to know our wants and desires. 1 Samuel 1:27 says “I asked the Lord to give me this child, and he has given me my request.”

Next is Confession. We are all sinners and when we pray we need to let God know that we know we are sinners and that we repent of our sinful nature. 1 John 1:9 says “But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.” All we have to do is to let God know that we consciously accept the fact that we have done wrong and sinned in his sight. By confessing to God, we are forgiven.

Finally, look at your thumb. As the thumb touches all four fingers, so praise should permeate our whole prayer life. We voice our wonder about God and his many acts. Our prayer praises God! Psalm 146:1-2 says “Praise the Lord, I tell myself. I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God even with my dying breath.”

Our hand is always with us. Let it form a pattern for a daily prayer life for each of us.

God and Government, An Insider's View on the Boundaries Between Faith and Politics, Zondervan, Copyright 2007

How should Christians live their faith in the public arena? Twenty years ago, the first edition of Chuck Colson's "Kingdoms in Conflict" became a bestseller, a must-read for people interested in politics and the relationship between church and state. Now, with a passion for truth and moved by the urgency of the times we live in, Colson has written *God and Government*, re-voicing his powerful and enduring message for our post-9/11 world. In an era when Christianity is being attacked from every side—books being written charging Christians with being theocrats and trying to impose their views on an unwilling culture—what is the message of the Christian church? What does the Bible say, and what do we learn from history about the proper relationship between faith and culture? Appealing to scripture, reason, and history, this book tackles society's most pressing and divisive issues. New stories and examples reflect the realities of today, from the clash with radical Islam to the deep division between "reds" and "blues." In an era of angry finger-pointing, Colson furnishes a unique insider's perspective that can't be pigeonholed as either "religious right" or "religious left."

Whatever your political or religious stance, this book will give you a different understanding of Christianity. If you're a Christian, it will help you to both examine and defend your faith. If you've been critical of the new religious right, you'll be shocked at what you learn. Probing both secular and religious values, *God and Government* critiques each fairly, sides with neither, and offers a hopeful, fair-minded perspective that is sorely needed in today's hyper-charged atmosphere.

The Grand Weaver, How God Shapes Us Through the Events of Our Lives, Ravi Zacharias, Zondervan, Copyright 2007

With inspiring stories and thought-provoking questions, Ravi Zacharias traces the multiple threads of our lives, describing how the unseen hand of God guides our joys, our tragedies, our daily humdrum to weave a pattern of divine providence and meaning. How differently would we live if we believed that every dimension of our lives—from the happy to the tragic to the mundane—were part of a beautiful and purposeful design in which no thread were wrongly woven? That's what best-selling author and internationally-known apologist, Ravi Zacharias, explores in *The Grand Weaver*. As Christians, we believe that great events such as a death or a birth are guided by the hand of God. Yet we drift into feeling that our daily lives are the product of our own efforts. This book brims with penetrating stories and insights that show us otherwise. From a chance encounter in a ticket line to a beloved father's final word before dying, from a random phone call to a line in a Scripture reading, every detail of life is woven into its perfect place. In *The Grand Weaver*, Dr. Zacharias examines our backgrounds, our disappointments, our triumphs, and our beliefs, and explains how they are all part of the intentional and perfect work of the Grand Weaver.

Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony, Richard Bauckham, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Copyright 2006

This momentous book argues that the four Gospels are closely based on the eyewitness testimony of those who personally knew Jesus. Noted New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham challenges the prevailing assumption that the accounts of Jesus circulated as "anonymous community traditions," asserting instead that they were transmitted in the names of the original eyewitnesses. To drive home this controversial point, Bauckham draws on internal literary evidence, the use of personal names in first-century Jewish Palestine, and recent developments in the understanding of oral tradition. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* also taps into the rich resources of modern study of memory, especially in cognitive psychology, refuting the conclusions of the form critics and calling New Testament scholarship to make a clean break with this long-dominant tradition. Finally, Bauckham challenges readers to end the classic division between the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of faith," proposing instead the "Jesus of testimony" as presented by the Gospels.

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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**

RENEWAL Conference Director: **Pastor Tom Bentum**

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