

BARMEN, CHURCH, AND ABORTION

Back on February 21 of this year, the Christian Unity Committee of the North Carolina Council of Churches sponsored its third Conference on the Common Good. Titled “Christian Conviction and Cultural Accommodation,” the conference took place at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Greensboro, NC, and focused on The Barmen Declaration of 1934 (see www.sacred-texts.com/chr/barmen.htm). The purpose of the conference was to encourage a diverse group of Christians to engage in serious, civil discourse about The Barmen Declaration and its relevance for our time and place. Mission accomplished.

The conference began with an insightful devotional offered by The Reverend Dr. F. Belton Joyner, Jr., a United Methodist pastor who is an eight-time delegate to General Conference. Dr. Joyner’s devotional featured a brief account of the rather aggressive ministry of Saint Peter Damian, whose feast day is February 21. He noted: “We know which side to choose in today’s topic: ‘Christian Conviction and Cultural Accommodation.’ We know that truth is not designed with wiggle room. And yet. And yet. We come apart this day to struggle with the way that truth is to be told. We come apart this day to test Jesus Christ against the world, knowing that it is a world He came not to destroy, but to save” (see “devotional reflections” at www.northcarolinacouncilofchurches.org/2011/03/report-on-the-common-good-conference/). That is, the Church is to be “against the world for the world,” to invoke the title of Richard John Neuhaus’ 1976 book on The Hartford Appeal.

Continuing, the conference then turned to Dr. Robert T. Osborn, a United Methodist clergyman and an honest-to-goodness Barthian who taught, for years, in Duke University’s Department of Religion and Divinity School. Dr. Osborn’s excellent presentation retold, in the most powerful terms, the memorable story of The Barmen Declaration (click on “Dr. Osborn’s address” on the aforementioned web page). One of his ringing points drew from the theologian Hans Asmussen: “If we protest against German

Christian theology...we are protesting against that same phenomenon which for more than two hundred years has been slowly preparing the devastation of the church.”

The Barmen Declaration was written by Karl Barth (a father, and probably the father, of Protestant theology in modern times) and confirmed in May of 1934 by the Confessing Synod of the German Evangelical Church meeting in Barmen, Germany. The declaration was a clarion call for the Church in Germany to be the Church of Jesus Christ—not the Church for Nazi Germany. The declaration’s first article confesses: “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.” (Our Confessional Heritage, PC(USA), 1978, p. 154) You get the idea. The Barmen Declaration protested for the faith of the Church of Jesus Christ and against German Protestant Christianity’s accommodation to the Nazi temptation.

Why bring up this historical and theological material in Lifewatch? Is this not rather esoteric and exotic stuff for the Lifewatch community in 2011?

This pastor believes that, regarding The United Methodist Church and abortion, The Barmen Declaration’s protest against the Church’s accommodation to culture is exactly the point. This is why. Through the ages, the Church catholic has preached, taught, and ministered for life and against abortion. However, for generations, Methodism in America had no official teaching on the matter. Then arose the Women’s Movement and the Sexual Revolution, both of which generally considered abortion and abortion rights essential to their agendas. These two movements pulled the elite institutions of American society—the prestige media, the colleges and universities, Hollywood, and so on—into their strong current. As a sign of the cultural power of these movements, remember the United States Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, which knocked

down the abortion laws of the fifty states and made abortion readily available across the nation. How did the newly created United Methodist Church respond to the Women's Movement, the Sexual Revolution, and the political pressure for abortion rights? By culturally accommodating itself to abortion-on-demand elites. Consciously or not, United Methodism set aside the Church's historic, ecumenical teaching on life and abortion and adopted a pro-choice position with pro-life nuances. In doing so, The United Methodist Church did not act alone. Many other Protestant denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, behaved similarly. Even so, the United Methodist response to the challenge posed by abortion is not exactly an ecclesiastical profile in courage.

To this day, on the matter of life and abortion The United Methodist Church remains accommodated to the elite institutions of American society. Paragraph 161J, of The Book of Discipline's Social Principles, offers many morally pro-life statements and claims, and yet it favors maintaining abortion rights in American law. Just as many Protestants in Germany accommodated themselves to the Nazi ideology carried by powerful cultural institutions of their day, so many United Methodists in America accommodate themselves to the pro-choice ideology carried by powerful cultural institutions of our time.

It is time for The United Methodist Church to own up to its cultural accommodation on life and abortion. It is time for The United Methodist Church to adopt the Church universal's "Christian conviction" on life and abortion. It is time for The United Methodist Church to remember the story of The Barmen Declaration as an heroic story of the Church in faithfulness. Actually, it is past time for The United Methodist Church to heed the challenge and warning of Barmen.

(To be sure, there are other ways to understand The Barmen Declaration applied to American Christianity today. However, the application offered above seems to this pastor to be pertinent and plausible.) (Paul T. Stallsworth)♥

WHAT THE DICKENS? A VOICE FOR THE EXPLOITED CHILDREN

by Rev. Paul Crikelair

It was the best of times, it was the age of reading 15,333 pages in six months, it was the epoch of tackling the ultimate reading project, it was the season of reading the complete works of Charles Dickens, it was the spring of hope to this pro-life pastor.

It certainly was no venture for the timid. The typical Dickens novel spans one thousand pages with about forty unforgettable characters weaving their way through highly complex plots. But excepting of

course Shakespeare, Dickens is arguably the greatest writer England ever produced—so said Tolstoy. And I second him.

Most will recall that Dickens was a powerful social critic, who called attention to the widespread moral ills and injustices of Victorian society. What is not so often recalled is how Dickens used the figure of the child—the helpless, neglected, abused child, forsaken and abandoned by his adult “protectors”—to focus his calls for compassionate reform. Indeed, Dickens spoke up eloquently for nineteenth century exploited, victimized children in a way that resonates deeply with our own twenty-first century pro-life convictions.

Here follows a “baker’s dozen” of examples, beginning with some of the most famous and going on to some not so well known. I invite you to read some of these classics, to enter the wonderfully imaginative world of Dickens, and to be inspired and challenged by his compassionate voice for the exploited children.

A Christmas Carol: “God bless us every one!” There is no more enduring child in all of Dickens than the poor, crippled Tiny Tim with his withered limbs and carefully preserved crutch, condemned to die and decrease the surplus population—until the transformed Scrooge finds special care so that he can live. And there are other children too: “From the foldings of its robe, (the Spirit) brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. ‘They are Man’s,’ said the Spirit, looking down upon them. ‘And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both...’”

Oliver Twist: “The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbors nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: ‘Please, sir, I want some more.’”

David Copperfield: The young David tells us that he became, at just ten years old, a little laboring hand, employed with other boys to examine a great many empty bottles against the light, rinsing and washing, pasting labels, fitting corks, packing in casks, “...and I was out at the warehouse all day, and had to support myself on that money all the week. From Monday morning until Saturday night, I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from any one, that I can call to mind, as I hope to go to heaven!”

Great Expectations: All the action of this Dickens classic flows out of the opening scene through the petrified eyes of the innocent seven-year-old orphan Pip, who encounters an escaped convict in the village churchyard hard by his own parents’ graves, and is terrified into stealing food and a file for him.

The Old Curiosity Shop: It was the heroic figure of Little Nell Trent, taking her grandfather by the hand

and leading him on, desperately stalking him at the card-sharpers, that famously drew the throngs to New York Harbor to await the arrival of the next installment. But in the end, they read: “She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who had lived and suffered death.... She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead.... Where were the trace of her early cares, her sufferings and fatigues: All gone.... So shall we know the angels in their majesty, after death.”

Hard Times: The attempted industrial dehumanization of Thomas Grandgrind’s children, Tom and Louisa, is counterbalanced by the circus child Sissy Jupe, who along with Mr. Sleary is the embodiment of humanity’s imagination, hope, and faith.

Bleak House: Regarded by many critics as Dickens’ literary masterpiece, this novel includes the character of Jo, a young and homeless child who lives on the streets and tries to make a living as a sweeper. Jo dies a pathetic death from pneumonia, a complication from an earlier bout with smallpox, after which Dickens writes: “Dead! Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.”

Nicholas Nicholby: Wackford Squeers—the cruel, sadistic, villainous, one-eyed Yorkshire schoolmaster—runs Dotheboys Hall, a place where unwanted children (like the pathetic figure of Smike) can be sent away and horribly abused, until Nicholas finally rises up and puts him in his place.

Little Dorrit: William Dorrit has been a resident of Marshalea’s debtor’s prison for so long that his children—Fanny, Tip, and Amy (the “Little Dorrit” of the title)—have all grown up there. Amy alone remains devoted to her father and, through her sewing, has been financially supporting the two of them.

Dombey and Son: Poor little Paul Dombey, who is weak and often ill, does not socialize normally with other children. Paul is sent away by his father to Brighton, where he and the other boys undergo an arduous education. Here in this “great hothouse,” separated from his elder sister Florence whom he loves intensely, Paul’s health declines ever further, and he dies a sad death, still only six years old.

Barnaby Rudge: Barnaby is a child in the body of a man. He is a restless, unearthly, twenty-three-year-old idiot who (with his pet raven Grip, the inspiration for Poe’s immortal poem) is easily manipulated by others—and only miraculously saved from execution—during the anti-Catholic riots of 1780 in this historical novel.

American Notes: Upon landing in Boston after his 1842 maiden voyage to America, Dickens went almost immediately to the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, where he was introduced to a young boy and girl, Oliver Caswell and Laura Bridgman, both deaf, dumb, and blind. Of them, he said: “But the immortal spirit which had been implanted within [them] could not die, nor be maimed nor mutilated.” In a remarkable display of compassion, Dickens devoted an astonishing twelve pages of narrative to this pair of handicapped children, and concluded with a rousing challenge reminding his readers of the sacredness of every child: “Ye who have eyes and see not, and have ears and hear not; ye who are as the hypocrites of sad countenances, and disfigure your faces that ye may seem unto men to fast; learn healthy cheerfulness, and mild contentment, from the deaf, and dumb, and blind! Self-elected saints with gloomy brows, this sightless, earless, voiceless child may teach you lessons you will do well to follow. Let that poor hand of yours lie gently on your hearts; for there may be something in its healing touch akin to that of the Great Master whose precepts you misconstrue, whose lessons you pervert, of whose charity and sympathy with all the world, not one among you in his daily practice knows as much as many of the worst among these fallen sinners, to whom you are liberal in nothing but the preachment of perdition!”

The Life of Our Lord: Written by Dickens for his own children, to whom he read it aloud every Christmas, this simple retelling of the life of Jesus reveals Dickens’ Christian faith and the source of his compassion for the exploited children. The book begins: “My Dear Children, I am very anxious that you should know something about the History of Jesus Christ. For everybody ought to know about Him. No one ever lived who was so good, so kind, so gentle, and so sorry for all people who did wrong, or were in any way ill or miserable, as He was.”

Rev. Crikelair is a founding member of the Lifewatch Advisory Board and the pastor of Cherry Valley United Methodist Church and Christ United Methodist Church of Poplar Valley, which are located near Stroudsburg, PA, where the Crikelair family resides.♥

LIFE IN THE PARISH

by Rev. Bryan Lassiter

Early in 2010, a young couple began attending one of the churches I serve. Soon, they asked me about presiding at a Service of Christian Marriage, for them, in the summer. I was delighted. Getting to know this young couple had been a pleasure. I agreed to perform the service and to begin the necessary pre-marital counseling.

In early spring, we met for the first of our counseling sessions. During that session, the couple confided in me that they were pregnant. They did not

want it known to the church community at that point. While this circumstance was a surprise, both of them were overjoyed, and they professed that they felt like they were ready for the responsibility of raising their child.

We observe the Sacrament of Holy Communion regularly on the first Sunday of each month. This couple was not at church the first Sunday in the month following their confidential confession. The next time we celebrated Holy Communion, they were in attendance. During the worship service's announcements, the young man announced to the assembled church that he and his fiancée were expecting a child. Later, during Communion, when they came forward, they knelt at the altar rail as usual. When I got to them, I served them the Bread, Wine, and presence of Christ. Then I placed my hand on the young woman's head and pronounced a blessing for the baby, just as I would for a baby in arms. The young lady's eyes filled with tears as she looked up at me. To see the unexpected expression of emotion, gratitude, and peace on her face was one of the greatest blessings the Lord has given this pastor in ministry.

The epilogue to the story is that they did get married last summer. Then, recently, I had the honor of baptizing the parents and their baby. This was another blessing the Lord has given this pastor through one young couple.

Rev. Lassiter pastors Belgrade United Methodist Church and Tabernacle United Methodist Church, and lives in Cedar Point, NC.♥

BERNARD N. NATHANSON, 1926-2011: A SERVANT OF HUMAN LIFE

Dr. Bernard Nathanson was an obstetrician-gynecologist who practiced in New York City. Early on, he helped establish the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (now called NARAL Pro-Choice America) and was its medical adviser. After the 1970 legalization of abortion in New York, he directed the Center for Reproductive and Sexual Health, which he later called "the largest abortion clinic in the Western world." From 1970 until 1972, under his directorship, this clinic performed 60,000 abortions—5,000 of which he personally performed. Under his supervision, another 10,000 abortions were done at St. Luke's Hospital in Manhattan.

In due course, Dr. Nathanson saw clearly the error of his ways and became a powerful spokesman for protecting the unborn child and mother from abortion. With Richard N. Ostling, he wrote the important book Aborting America (Life Cycle Books, 1979). Later, he

Please remember to pray and fast for the ministry of Lifewatch on the first Tuesday of every month.

helped produce "The Silent Scream," a 1985 film that documented the stages of development of the unborn child and the death of an unborn child in an abortion. (New York Times, 02/22/11)

During the funeral service for Dr. Nathanson, Father Gerald E. Murray delivered the sermon. Fr. Murray quoted from Whittaker Chambers' book, Witness: "The daughter of a former German diplomat in Moscow was trying to explain to me why her father, who, as an enlightened modern man had been extremely pro-Communist, had become an implacable anti-Communist. But she loved her father and the irrationality of his defection embarrassed her. 'He was immensely pro-Soviet,' she said, 'and then—you will laugh at me—but you must not laugh at my father—and then one night—in Moscow he heard screams. That's all. Simply one night he heard screams.'

"A child of Reason and the 20th century, she knew that there is a logic of the mind. She did not know that the soul has a logic that may be more compelling than the mind's. She did not know at all that she had swept away the logic of the mind, the logic of history, the logic of politics, the myth of the 20th century, with five annihilating words: one night he heard screams."

Fr. Murray went on: "The scream Dr. Nathanson heard was a silent scream." ("The Witness of Bernard Nathanson," 03/08/11, www.firstthings.com)

The Lifewatch community thanks God for Dr. Bernard N. Nathanson—his faith in Jesus Christ and his witness to the human dignity of the unborn child. May he rest in God's eternal peace.

(Paul T. Stallsworth)♥

CALLED TO ACTION BECAUSE OF THE AVOIDANCE OF TEACHING?

The United Methodist Leadership Summit took place, across The United Methodist Church, on April 6, 2011. The summit's presenters were based in Nashville, TN. Leaders from each Annual Conference gathered at locations in their conferences to take part in the summit, via the Internet, on the "Call to Action Steering Team Report." (The report itself can be found at www.umc.org/atf/cf/{db6a45e4-c446-4248-82c8-e131b6424741}/CTA_STEERING%TEAM_%20RPT_1-44.PDF, and the archived Leadership Summit presentation can be found at www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.6584973/k.8BE4/Live_Stream.htm.) That report, you will remember, was unanimously adopted by the Council of Bishops in early November of 2010. The summit aimed to get church leaders, clergy and laity, on board the "Call to Action" train, which, by the force of organizational and media-generated momentum, is coming down the denomination's tracks, like it or not.

The summit, more or less, reviewed the Executive Summary of the "Call to Action Steering Team

Report.” While encouraging “holy conferencing,” among participants at the Annual Conference locations and among the participants and the presenters, the summit often referred to “*the adaptive challenge for The United Methodist Church*,” which is: “*To redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*” (Executive Summary, p. 8, emphases in the original). This, according to the Call to Action Steering Team, is the challenge we United Methodists face.

Toward the end of the three-hour summit, Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of The German Area put the Call to Action project in a helpful summary. She noted that the Call to Action is simply a call to change the culture of The United Methodist Church. That is, it was admitted, the denomination needs to move from politics to Christ-centered ministry.

What we have here, it seems to this pastor, is a church that has grown weary of moral and theological arguments (especially those regarding homosexual practice) within the household. Hence, the Call to Action, with its social-scientific studies, was summoned to the rescue. According to the Call to Action report, instead of granting “attention, energy, and resources” to those arguments, the denomination now needs to turn its attention to creating and sustaining vital congregations that will make disciples of Jesus Christ and transform the world.

This pastor would venture to claim that the arguments within the denomination, the Call to Action studies, and the Call to Action recommendations happened because of one, little fact: The Council of Bishops and individual bishops have not stepped up, led, and taught the faith on controverted matters within the church. Because the bishops have not taught, denominational dysfunction set in. Dissenters were emboldened. Arguments, in which the dissenting side did most of the talking, continued. Many across the church lost interest. Membership declined. Money dried up. And the church found itself in crisis. Hence, the Call to Action to the alleged rescue.

Instead of teaching Christian doctrine and morals to the church, the bishops are calling for the churches and the clergy to change the ways they order their ministries. God knows, our congregations and clergy can, and should, change in some areas. However, it seems to this pastor that the first ones to change should be the Council of Bishops and the bishops themselves. They should teach the Church’s faith—on homosexual practice and other matters—and not be afraid of creating tensions on the Council of Bishops. When there are bishops who oppose The United Methodist Church’s faith and practice, there should be tensions on the Council of Bishops.

So, at the end of the day, this pastor would suggest that the Call to Action is, in large part, a distraction from the bishops’ refusal to teach the faith to the church they have vowed to serve. Certainly, because of God’s amazing grace and providence, some good will come from the Call to Action. But in the main, the bishops are trying to lay down their pedagogical task and simply encourage congregational vitality. Sad to say, it probably will not work.

During the summit gathering in Greenville, NC that this pastor attended, I was struck by the large number of pastors who were skeptical about the Call to Action—because of its inattention to theology and teaching. That, in itself, is a good sign.
(Paul T. Stallsworth)♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

March 2, 2011

Dear Lifewatch:

For all of my adult life, I have been strongly against abortion. In fact, through the years I have given many passionate speeches against abortion. Thus, it was fitting in 2008 when God gave my wife, Gloria, the pro-life message—“Thank God mom was pro-life.”—which is on the book mark I have enclosed. He told her to work for saving the babies. This she has done. Since 2008, we have given away thousands of bumper stickers, book marks, post cards, pens, wrist bands, and other pro-life materials throughout the United States.

We have always received the cooperation of most churches except our own United Methodist church. I thought it was due to the fact that ministers did not want to offend the feminists. Almost two weeks ago, we attended the wedding of my brother at a United Methodist church near Charlotte. The pastor was a woman. My wife asked her during the reception about her stand on abortion. She said that she was against abortion but could not preach against it because The United Methodist Church believes in abortion. I could hardly believe my ears. The next day I spoke with my nephew who holds a doctoral degree in theology and is a United Methodist minister. He said what the clergywoman said was true, and that, in fact, he believes in abortion. At this point, I began my research.

I found out that The United Methodist Church began, in 1973, to take a strong stand for abortion and was allied with the radical group RCRC [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice].

Needless to say, with God leading me, I resigned from the United Methodist church where I have been a member for my entire life. I now have peace that is beyond all understanding.

The United Methodist Church has ignored the fact that God would never give a woman the right to kill her baby. In fact, the baby does not belong to her, but

to God. You and I belong to God. God is the source of all life. When we are conceived, He has a plan for each of us. God says, "I knew you before you were in your mother's womb."

You must have an inner struggle with your conscious. How can you give Communion without seeing the river of blood of unborn babies flowing through The United Methodist Church?

Sincerely,

Don Neal/P.O. Box 310/Rock Hill, SC 29731

Lifewatch is grateful to Mr. Neal for his passionate, compelling letter. United Methodism's ambiguous teaching on abortion—morally pro-life and politically pro-choice—is highly problematic and violates historic, ecumenical Christianity's consensus on life and abortion. While understanding his moral reasons for departing from The United Methodist Church, we believe that we have been called by obedience to Jesus Christ through the baptismal covenant in The United Methodist Church. (See "Why Stay" in the December 2010 issue of Lifewatch.) In response to the last sentence of Mr. Neal's letter, I must thankfully testify that, over the years, Jesus Christ's faithful, empowering presence in Holy Communion gives this pastor what is needed to witness for life, and against abortion, in a denomination that has indeed helped create and sustain a "river of blood of unborn babies." —Editor ♥

A LITTLE FUN

What follows is the result of a United Methodist pastor who became ill, and could not visit house to house, during November 2010. Excess time in the pastor's study really can lead to mischief. We tried, unsuccessfully, to make the following lines suitable for singing to the tune of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

TWELVE PROGRAMS OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 1973-2011:

Over recent decades, before conferences, twelve memos came to us...

Twelve Keys to an Effective Church,

Eleven: Key 73,

Ten Guidelines for Holy Conferencing,

Nine: Rethink Church,

Eight: Change the World,

Seven Vision Pathways,

Six Golden Words: Open Hearts, Open Minds,
Open Doors,

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations,

Four Areas of Focus,

Three Simple Rules,

Vision Two Thousand,

One Mission Statement,

And pastors in need of a wellness plan!

(Paul T. Stallsworth/12.05.10)♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Every gift you make to the ministry of Lifewatch is very much appreciated. Because of you and your faithfulness, Lifewatch can strive to be faithful in witnessing to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church.

If you would like to give a gift to Lifewatch today, you can make that happen in three ways: (1) send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/ Cottleville, MO 63338; (2) use PayPal, by clicking on the "Make a Donation" icon, on our homepage at www.lifewatch.org; and (3) donate stocks by contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office.

Again, thank you.

- Remember that Annual Conferences will be electing delegates to attend the 2012 General Conference and Jurisdictional Conferences. It is not impolite to ask potential delegates about their position on life and abortion. If such potential delegates answer with "I agree with The United Methodist Church's teaching on abortion (Paragraph 161J in The Book of Discipline)," please do not be satisfied. United Methodist teaching on abortion now tries to be both morally pro-life and politically pro-choice. That results in ambiguous teaching on life and abortion from our church, and in United Methodist agencies remaining affiliated with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Use your conversation with potential delegates as an opportunity to persuade and encourage United Methodists to stand with the unborn child and mother. And if you are an Annual Conference member, vote for delegates who will favor principled, pro-life positions. Thank you for witnessing for life in The United Methodist Church.

- Lifewatch remains grateful to The Reverend Dr. Edwin King for his 2011 Lifewatch Sermon, "This Little Light: We Have to Let It Shine" (see Lifewatch, 03/01/11). The sermon compellingly connects the moral witness of the Civil Rights Movement with the moral witness of the Pro-Life Movement.

The Methodist Federation for Social Action of North Carolina held its annual Jack Crum Conference on Prophetic Ministry on April 9, 2011 at Avent Ferry United Methodist Church in Raleigh, NC. The Reverend James M. Lawson—"the Pastor Emeritus at Holman United Methodist [Church] of Los Angeles, a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Vanderbilt University, and a renowned Civil Rights Movement leader" (conference bulletin)—delivered the keynote address. In his address, he beautifully asserted the Biblical vision of creation and the Kingdom of God. In each human face, he noted, we should see the image of God. Rev. Lawson set forth love as the means to social change: "Love is not impotent. Love is powerful. Love is persuasive. Love, through the cross, is transforming." That is the truth.

The Lifewatch community yearns for the day when the Civil Rights Movement will see unborn children and their mothers as God's children to be protected. As is

well known, African American and Hispanic American unborn children and mothers are being aborted at rates even higher than the abortion rate for white unborn children. All unborn children desperately need the articulate voices of moral leaders like Rev. Lawson to speak for them. Pray for that day.

● “Dr. Alveda King (niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) calls the abortion business ‘the most racist industry in America.’ Quoting Catholic philosopher Michael Novak, she writes, ‘Since the number of current living Blacks (in the U.S.) is 31 million, the missing 10 million represents an enormous loss, for without abortion, America’s Black community... would be 35% larger than it is. Abortion has swept through the Black community like a scythe, cutting down every fourth member.’” This is from Charles Colson’s article “Abortion: So Much for Truth in Advertising” (Breakpoint, April 1, 2011, www.crosswalk.com)

● “Summing up the problem of sin within the Church, [Father Valentine Sventitsky, a Russian priest] said: ‘A sin within the Church is not sin of the Church, but against the Church.’ Breaking away from the Church, because of the moral derelictions we see in it, is religiously foolish and reflects our inability to think things through. Anything wrong, distorted, and impure that we see within the gates of the Church is not the Church. To avoid associating with it, we do not have to leave the Church enclosure, we must simply refuse to participate in that which is evil. Then will be fulfilled the words ‘to the pure all things are pure’ (Titus 1:15).” --Sergei Fudel (1901-1977, a Russian Orthodox writer), Light in the Darkness from For All the Saints: A Prayer Book for and by the

Church ([Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994] Volume I, p. 778)

● Jim Winkler, the General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church, writes a column called “Word from Winkler.” His November 3, 2010 article is entitled “History Lessons” (www.umc-gbcs.org). In his column, Mr. Winkler wisely notes: “We (United Methodists) are reluctant...to challenge the militarism, consumerism, and materialism of which we are an active part. If we do not take the teachings of Jesus to heart, we can and will get swept up in crusades, campaigns and movements we will later regret.” Such as a crusade, campaign, and movement that promotes abortion rights? One day, God willing, United Methodists will indeed regret that part of our history.

● In March, one of the active, United Methodist bishops in the United States wrote and posted a good, solid article on increasing accountability in the congregation. Noticing at the bottom of the article that a reader could “leave a reply,” this pastor typed a brief one. Wish I had saved it. It said something like this: *Consider the thirtysomething retired United Methodist bishops’ call to change the church’s ordination standards. If the active bishops would offer to the aforementioned retired bishops a response that resembled a call to accountability, it would encourage pastors and congregations to establish a greater sense of accountability at the local level.* The reply was removed after a few hours.

Later, a telephone conversation with a conference staffer revealed that the reply did not, in her opinion, meet the established standards for publication. The

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Lifewatch
Taskforce of
United Methodists on
Abortion and Sexuality

P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338

06/01/11

* Barmen, Church, and Abortion

* Bernard N. Nathanson, 1926-2011:

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website states those standards: “Fivepractices.org is committed to providing open conversation and sharing of information among congregations of the Christian faith. Comments are immediately displayed on the site when they are submitted. However, we reserve the right to remove comments that will be distasteful or seem vulgar to other guests to the site. The final determination as to whether comments are appropriate will be made by the website coordinator.” The standards, applied to my reply, generate additional questions. Is this website truly “committed to providing open conversation?” Was my response “distasteful?” Or “vulgar?”

Too often today, censorship seems to be practiced across The United Methodist Church. Censorship implies: get with the program, or please keep your critical comments to yourself. Our denomination was once a church in which the great (and not-so-great) debates of Church and society could take place. They were even encouraged. Today, not so true.

● Father Frank Pavone “Settled Law? Not So Fast...” claims: “...America’s courts and legislatures have a proud history of changing ‘settled law.’” The U.S. Supreme has a history of its decisions being reversed—for example, [Dred Scott v. Sanford](#) (1856), [Plessy v. Ferguson](#) (1896), [Lochner v. New York](#) (1905), and [Hammer v. Dagenhart](#) (1918). Fr. Pavone explains: “Any reversals of Supreme Court cases came about when new evidence was brought forward that made it clear that someone’s rights, not previously recognized, were being violated We are now witnessing the same trend regarding the children in the womb. Evidence that has been around for quite some time demonstrating their humanity is finding its way into legislatures and courts.... The day after [Roe v. Wade](#) (1973) was decided, the [New York Times](#) headline read, ‘Supreme Court Settles Abortion.’” As

Fr. Pavone’s title indicates, “not so fast...” (www.priestsforlife.org)

● The Roman Catholic Church’s beatification of John Paul II on May 1 prompted this comment from the National Pro-Life Religious Council, to which Lifewatch proudly belongs: “Pope John Paul II was a gift not only to the Roman Catholic community, but to the entire Body of Christ, as he pointed to Christ as the only source of life and hope for the human family. His courageous challenge both to the Church and to the State to defend the most vulnerable among us echoes the historic Christian teaching that life comes from God, belongs to God, and goes back to God.

“The National Pro-Life Religious Council calls upon all Christians to recognize again that it is our discipleship of Jesus Christ, rather than any ideology or political platform, that impels us today and always to defend life and to eliminate from our midst the scourge of abortion. We thank the Lord for giving us such a powerful example of that commitment in Pope John Paul II.”♥

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