

# We Confess



Oct - Dec  
2017

## *What Is Doctrine?* By Pastor Phil Thrailkill



Pastor Thrailkill is a retired  
UM Pastor in the SEJ

Doctrine is a “churchy” word, but simple in meaning. It means teaching (Latin *doctrina*). God showed up in history, and one of the responses was to reflect on the meaning of events and write them down. Finding out such a God exists and wants a relationship is a big deal!

This long history has two parts: 1) God’s call of his people (the Old Testament), and 2) God’s appearance in Jesus who creates a new community around himself (the New Testament). Official teaching summarizes insights and guards against distortion. Doctrine is conservative; it values what God has shown and preserves the gift intact for future generations.

The Bible is a big book, and so the necessity of brief summaries for teaching. The shortest Christian confession is “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3), and when you discover that Lord is the Old Testament name for God, you see how bold a claim it is. A longer creed is 1 Cor. 15:3-5. Here we learn that the Messiah died for our sins, was buried, was bodily raised, and appeared to many. Jesus is alive, and his Spirit is soon poured out on the church as a communications link. The Holy Spirit exposes intellectual and moral threats and preserves us in the faith. Bad doctrine is toxic.

The church’s formulation of its trust in God as Father, Son, and Spirit came to a stable form in the Apostle’s Creed, and a bit later in the Nicene Creed. Every line is a Yes to one idea and a No to another. Not many gods, but only One. Creation is not eternal; it was made. The church has a list of convictions. They are the classic content of this faith.

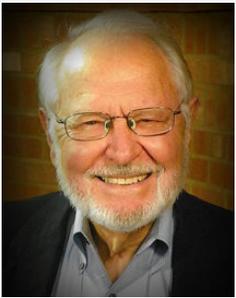
In the aftermath of the 16th century Reformation, Protestant teaching was often stated in numbered articles, as in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England and in the revised version John Wesley sent to the American Methodists in 1784. And when, in 1968, the “Confession of Faith” was included from the Evangelical United Brethren, our new church found itself with two complementary sets of articles that preserve the faith of the early church, teach the Reformation doctrines of salvation, order the church’s life, and teach the Wesleyan distinctives of free grace and growth in holiness. Our Doctrinal Standards now consist of five documents: (1) the Articles of Religion, (2) the Confession of Faith, (3) the Standard Sermons of Wesley, (4) his Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, (5) the General Rules. In a time of moral confusion and shrill voices, do your homework. Read and study our Doctrinal Standards! Dig down to the solid foundation.

### IN THIS ISSUE:

- [What is Doctrine?](#)
- [Schism & Separation](#)
- [Did Jesus Teach about Homosexuality?](#)
- [Understanding Catholic Spirit](#)
- [Recovering a Healthy Sense of Sin](#)
- [Patience & Faithfulness](#)

There are many pastors and some laity quoting historical writings, statements and verbal communication to support a change to the language in the Discipline regarding ordination and marriage of LGBTQ persons. In this newsletter, several Confessing Movement board members are addressing some of these often misquoted or only partially quoted positions that are important to know and understand regarding their implication for the future of the UMC.

Rev. Phil Thraikill delves into the history of our doctrine while Dr. Maxie Dunnam considers what schism and separation mean in the context of the United Methodist Church. Rev. Greg Stover looks at what Jesus says about homosexuality and Dr. Charles Kyker explores the Catholic Spirit. Lastly, Rev. Larry Baird advocates for recovering a healthy sense of sin. Our position on these issues should bind us together, not tear us apart.



Dr. Dunnam is a retired UM Pastor and former President of Asbury Theological Seminary

## SCHISM AND SEPARATION

*Dr. Maxie Dunnam*

The United Methodist Church is in crisis. Any United Methodist who is aware of the larger picture of our church is hearing about the possibility of division.

Two words are being used interchangeably, schism and separation. If you look at the primary definition of the two words, you find little or no difference. Both indicate the process for being separated. For the purpose of this discussion, I want to use both words to describe where we seem to be in United Methodism: *Because of schism among us we have separation in the body.*

After his descriptive metaphor of the church as the *body*, Paul gives this challenge: "There *should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*" (I Corinthians 12:25 New KJV) The existence of differences of gifts, and the exalting of particular gifts in the Church, had been used by the Corinthians to cause schisms. Many translations use *division* here instead of *schism*. Both words name a separation not *from*, but *within*, the church. Thus, schism

within may lead to separation from a particular expression of the church, but not from the Church as the Body of Christ.

There is schism in the UMC body. What Bishop Melvin Talbert did April 23, 2016 when he performed a same sex wedding in Birmingham, Alabama was a blatant act which made visible what should have been acknowledged for a long time. This was a schismatic act.

Years before another Bishop, Joseph Sprague, raised similar shock waves of schism when he published *Affirmations of a Dissenter*, putting in print some of what he had been teaching, i.e. that Jesus was not born of a virgin nor did he possess trans-human, supernatural powers, that stories in the New Testament are not literally true, along with other explicit challenges to the authority of Scripture and the beliefs of the orthodox Christian faith.

Schismatic action has seemingly become the "everyday" occurrence in our church: an entire Jurisdictional Conference officially declared they will not abide by the Church's will on marriage and human sexuality and blatantly actualized their schismatic action by electing a person in a same sex marriage as bishop. Bishop Ough,

*Schismatic action  
has seemingly become  
the "everyday"  
occurrence in our church.*

Dunnam (continued)

the President of our Council of Bishops, has rightly contended that “the landscape has changed,” so our Bishops have appointed a task force charged with “finding a way forward” for the unity of our church.

Wesley taught that there are times when we have to separate ourselves from those who are hindering faithfulness and the spread of the Gospel. He was accused of schism when he preached the Gospel in its fullness which led to the founding of the Methodist movement. Though he remained an Anglican priest, he was not in good standing, and the Methodist movement, particularly in the United States, was a separation from the Church of England.

There may be a way of being unified by papering over our disunity. Isn't it too much to ask “conscience driven” people, who believe that same-sex marriage and the ordination of practicing homosexual persons are

justice issues, to give up their convictions for the sake of some sort of institutional unity? Can we ask persons who are convinced by their faithful study of Scripture and the witness of the church for 2000 years, that the practice of homosexuality and the marriage of same sex couples are incompatible with Christian teaching, to compromise their consciences committed to Biblical authority?

This is a *kairos* time. We must renew our commitment to Christ and to The United Methodist Church, willingly being obedient to our doctrine and discipline as we have corporately and in Christian conferencing defined ourselves. If we can't make that commitment and live in covenant faithful to it, then let's participate earnestly, responsibly, and in Christian love in exploring an alternative which may mean separation as a legitimate missional response to our dividedness. ■



Patricia Miller  
Executive Director  
The Confessing  
Movement

Earlier this year I was privileged to attend a colloquy at Chandler School of Theology in Atlanta. During the meeting Dr. Russ Richey, dean emeritus of Candler School of Theology and William R. Cannon Distinguished Professor of Church History Emeritus, Emory University, spoke of the history of the Methodist Church. He also spoke at the second meeting of the Commission on a Way Forward. In part, Dr. Richey reviewed the first 100 years of Methodism where there was division and separation within every 10 year period. Separation brought growth and vitality to each separated segment of the church. Structural separation occurred over a dozen times from 1780 to 1890. Conflict, disunity and separation are not new to Methodism. John Wesley brought about Methodism in and through division and separation.

**The Confessing Movement office will be closed Monday December 25, 2017 through January 1, 2018. We will reopen on Tuesday, January 2, 2018. May you and your family enjoy fellowship and joy during the Christmas Season and into the New Year!**



# Did Jesus Teach Anything about Homosexuality?

Rev. Greg Stover

In conversation about same-sex relationships we frequently hear someone confidently assert, “Well, Jesus never mentioned same-sex practice or relationships!” Often the speaker follows confidently by saying, “As Christians we follow Jesus supremely as Lord; nowhere in his teaching did Jesus specifically mention homosexuality; therefore, followers of Jesus, of course, should affirm same-sex relationships and marriages.”

An appropriate response is, “Yes, but ... !” Yes, Jesus never mentioned homosexuality specifically. But, Jesus never specifically mentioned kidnapping, bestiality, identity theft, white-collar crime, racism, or a host of other things which Christians of every stripe rightly count as contrary to the way of Jesus. The Biblical literalism that concludes that because Jesus didn’t mention it he must affirm it, fails to consider the broader implications of Jesus’ teaching. In his teaching on marriage and human sexuality Jesus reflects continuity and consistency with the teaching of the Old Testament, the teaching of Paul the apostle and the remainder of the New Testament. A careful study of Jesus’ teachings leads to almost certain evidence that Jesus would not have affirmed same-sex intercourse or marriages. Let’s look more deeply at Jesus’ teaching about marriage and sexual relationships.

Matthew 19:3-11 (see also Mark 10:10-12) records Pharisees coming to test Jesus about divorce. One school of the Pharisees taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. A second school believed that only marital infidelity could justify divorce. While Jesus acknowledges that Moses permitted divorce, he also notes that Moses accommodated divorce in the law because God’s people hardened their hearts and disobeyed God’s original intention for marriage. Jesus sided with those Pharisees of the second school. In doing so, Jesus pointed directly back to the story of Creation: **“Have you not read, that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? Then Jesus added, “so they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”** (Mt. 19:4-6, NIV)

With these words, Jesus clearly affirms that marriage between a man and woman reflects the will of God and the ordering of God’s creation from the beginning. Homosexual practice was a well-known component of Greek and Roman culture surrounding the Jews. Yet, Jesus does not need to address the matter because the Hebrew Scriptures affirm marriage between one man and woman as the only context approved by God for sexual expression.

Additional insight about Jesus’ teaching is found in Mark 7:21-23. Jesus explains that it is **“... what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride folly.”** The word in the text used for “fornication” is *porneiai*, literally “sexual immoralities.” Jesus’ listeners, steeped in Jewish tradition, would have quickly connected Jesus’ use of *porneiai* with the list of sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20: incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, bestiality. Jesus uses the same Greek word in Matthew 19:9 when he makes “unchastity” the sole exception to his stance against divorce.

Jesus did not hesitate to correct the misinterpretations and distortions of God’s law (See the “But I say to you” sentences in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5). If Jesus believed the creation accounts had neglected to affirm same-sex relationships or if he believed that the prohibitions of Leviticus 18 and 20 were out of date or misguided, it is hard to imagine that he would not have spoken boldly to correct the misinterpretation. Rather, Jesus’ life and teaching reflected a perfect balance of grace and truth expressed in holy love. Perhaps Jesus would respond to those engaged in homosexual acts today as he spoke to the woman caught in adultery --- **“I do not condemn you. Go, and sin no more.”**



Rev. Greg Stover is a  
retired UM Pastor  
in the NCJ.

# The Catholic Spirit - properly understood

Dr. Charles Kyker

Can you believe anything and be a United Methodist? Part of this confusion is amplified by those who have misused a go-to quote of John Wesley from his sermon *The Catholic Spirit* to embrace a form of theological pluralism:

"Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine? I ask no farther question. If it be, give me thy hand." (II Kings 10:15)

To be clear, Wesley passionately believed that followers of Christ are to love others who hold differing opinions, and even different core beliefs. We should always practice humility in our discourse with one another. Wesley does affirm tolerance for differing practices when it comes to worship and denominational preferences. The misrepresentation is the implication that Wesley valued, above all else, unity over core doctrinal beliefs.

The real distinction is between what Wesley meant as "opinion" and what he understood as core beliefs of Christian faith. Reverend Wesley understood that each person would have varying opinions upon many different subjects and was willing to admit that he himself was not right all the time. He writes, "Every wise man, therefore, will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him; and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions, than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs"

Suggesting that Wesley affirmed theological diversity on core doctrinal beliefs is both inaccurate and damaging to Wesleyan Scholarship. Furthermore, it is harmful to laity who desire to understand and practice our Wesleyan faith. In the sermon, "A Catholic Spirit" Wesley writes, "A man of a truly catholic spirit has not now his religion to seek. He is fixed as the sun in his judgement concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine...He does not halt between two opinions, nor vainly endeavor to blend them into one..."

Ironically, Wesley saw this same confusion in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century as to the meaning of the 'catholic spirit', "There is scarce any expression which has been more grossly misunderstood, and more dangerously misapplied." The Methodist founder states in the following outline what the person of a catholic spirit "is not":

**"first**, that a catholic spirit is not speculative latitudinarianism. It is not an indifference to all opinions: this is the spawn of hell, not the offspring of heaven."

In his Letter to a Roman Catholic Wesley clarifies orthodox beliefs:

- a) **Wesley believed in the primacy of scripture**, "We believe indeed, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God...We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule, both of Christian faith and practice..." Letter to a Roman Catholic
- b) **Wesley affirmed faith in a Triune God** where Father, Son and Holy Spirit are unique yet in perfect harmony with one another. Where Jesus was both savior and Lord and the Holy Spirit enables us to confess faith in Christ and to become holy.
- c) **Wesley describes both the pardon of sins and the promise of eternal life** for those who have repented of sin, "I believe God forgives all the sins of them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel; and that, at the last day, all men shall rise again."

**"secondly**, that a catholic spirit is not any kind of practical latitudinarianism. It is not indifference as to public worship...This, likewise, would not be a blessing but a curse." He goes on to emphasize that worship of God must be "both scriptural and rational."

**"thirdly**, learn, that a catholic spirit is not indifference to all congregations...no less absurd and unscriptural than the former." A person of a true catholic spirit partakes of the ordinances of God, such as fasting, prayer, and observes the sacraments.

Some may still wonder if you can believe anything and still be a United Methodist. I caution persons not to use *The Catholic Spirit* as a means to support such a claim. I affirm the late Dr. Albert C. Outler, "Wesley is quite specific and adamant about the essential doctrines of Christianity—and quite orthodox! Yet his 'catholic spirit' seeks to find that community of Christians which is constituted by faith and love..." *John Wesley*, p. 92



Dr. Charles Kyker is lead pastor  
at Christ UMC in Hickory, NC

# Recovering a Healthy Sense of Sin

Rev. Larry R. Baird

In 1973 Karl Menninger published his renowned book *Whatever Became of Sin?* (Hawthorn) pointing out that if we don't have the proper diagnosis we will have no clue what the cure might be. His basic premise was that we were burying and ignoring the reality of sin. It seems this trend has continued unabated.

*Sin as defined in orthodox Christianity is the condition of being separated from God's intent for us as a part of a good creation.*

Sin as defined in orthodox Christianity is the condition of being separated from God's intent for us as a part of a good creation. It is the condition of being divorced from holiness, the central attribute of God. "But as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" - 1 Peter 1:

15-16 (NIV). Holiness is, to put it another way, the original specification for human health and wholeness. Sin is the human revolt against God's blueprint for a whole humanity. Rather than loving God, and seeking to glorify God by loving our neighbors (Matthew 22: 37-39), humans turn inward to their own understanding and gratification. Sin is manifest in people when they feel life is essentially about them, their desires, feelings, and appetites; as opposed to glorifying God in all things and contributing to the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of others.

Our captivity to sin is the reason behind our unhealthy personal and social propensities and the negative results we often achieve in our personal lives and the cultures we create. It is why our hoped-for progress is rarely as positive as we would expect.

So how can we, as Christians, work with God in recovering God's image in us? How can we bring health and wholeness to a broken and sick world? How can we help clear the way for God's redeeming work? We must recover and acknowledge the profound reality of sin and an understanding that in its

place God intends for humanity to reflect God's holiness. We must recover the ability to name sin and be bold in saying "no" to it. Why? Because not all ways of living either personally or in community reflect God's intention for humanity. Love, after all, sometimes requires us to say "no." This is the necessary first step in any correction of our chronic problem in life. Saying "no" in these circumstances is a part of acknowledging sin. This opens the way for God's redeeming love. Knowing we cannot accomplish restoration on our own, God has provided a remedy specific to the problem of sin. This requires new birth in God's image through faith in God's personal act of intervention in Jesus Christ. When we come to faith in Christ, and what God has done, a new life begins, a life that glorifies God and honors God's intent for a good creation. At this new birth we become a new creation and there begins a life-long journey guided and nurtured by the Holy Spirit. This is a journey toward living into God's original, good, and excellent plan for us and the whole of creation.

The United Methodist Church can only faithfully find a way forward by leaving behind any theology or belief structure that ignores or attempts to bury the reality of sin and God's objective of reforming humanity with holiness.

As the church deals with its present impasse regarding whether or not Christians can condone homosexual practice, we need to have enough love to say "no." In the greater context of the issue we need to clearly state what holiness requires in all areas and issues of human sexuality. Then by God's grace, we need to recover a theological base in The United Methodist Church that is not dismissive of manifestations of sin and enables us to address the health and wholeness of humanity as it was meant to be in God's good creation.



Rev. Larry Baird is a retired UM pastor in the NEJ

## PLEASE MAKE A GIFT IN SUPPORT OF THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT

*Dr. John Ed Mathison*

A lot of people in The United Methodist Church have lost hope for the future of the Church. We started out as a tremendous movement in this country. It was a Spirit-driven movement that swept across the United States. I think you have to be moving to be a movement. We as the Church aren't moving much right now. We may be more aptly described as a monument or a museum rather than a movement. That can change! The Confessing Movement IS moving! We need your help to prepare for the 2019 General Conference. The future of our church is at stake!

To make a donation by mail:

Please send your check, money order, or cash gift to:

**The Confessing Movement**

7995 E 21st Street

Indianapolis, IN 46219

To make a gift by phone:

Call 317.356.9729 with your credit card information

To make a gift online:

Visit our website at [www.confessingumc.org/donate](http://www.confessingumc.org/donate)

## Patience and Faithfulness

*Patricia Miller*

Please be patient. The actual decision on a way forward will be decided by 2019 General Conference (GC). Continue your faithful witness and prayers for the church. Stay strong - God will prevail!

The Commission on a Way Forward has considered multiple options for a change in the UMC structure to accommodate our extremely different theological beliefs about Holy Scripture. The proposals are interim drafts and a final proposal will not be determined until spring of 2018. The Commission will consider the response of the Council of Bishops (COB) regarding the proposals sent to them in early November, prior to their meeting which was held November 5 -7, 2017.

In an official statement following the November meeting, the COB summarized the sketches of the models presented by the Commission as follows:

- One sketch of a model affirms the current *Book of Discipline* language and places a high value on accountability.
- Another sketch of a model removes restrictive language and places a high value on contextualization. This sketch also specifically protects the rights of those whose conscience will not allow them to perform same gender weddings or ordain LGBTQ persons.
- A third sketch of a model is grounded in a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services and one COB, while also creating different branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice.

Remember, the GC 2019 will have the final word on a way forward. Should the plan adopted by the GC require changes to the UMC constitution, a two-thirds majority of its delegates would need to vote affirmatively for the amendment to be ratified. Subsequently, each Annual Conference would vote to determine whether or not they will, as an Annual Conference, approve the amendment. This also requires a two-thirds majority vote in favor of the amendment. Finally, if two-thirds of the total number of Annual Conferences world wide votes to support the amendment, the amendment is ratified and becomes a part of the Discipline.

**The Confessing Movement**  
**within The United Methodist Church**

7995 East 21st Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46219  
(317) 356-9729

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
MAILED FROM ZIP CODE 52761  
PERMIT NO. 338

**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.**

**Officers**

**Honorary  
Chairman**

Maxie Dunnam

**President**

Charles Kyker

**1st Vice President**

Steve Wende

**Secretary**

Greg McGarvey

**Asst. Secretary**

Mickey Ellis

**Treasurer**

Joe Kilpatrick

**Editor-in-Chief,**

***We Confess & Pulse***

Pat Miller

**Editor, *We Confess***

Riley Case

**Board of Directors**

Turner Arant

Larry Baird

Shane Bishop

James Buskirk

Russell Cheatham

Bob Collins

Stan Cosby

Sam Daffin

Maxie Dunnam

Mickey Ellis

Judy Graham

David Jenkins

Joe Kilpatrick

Charles Kyker

John Ed Mathison

Gregory McGarvey

Dan Moore

Joy Moore

Wade Paschal

Matt Pennington

David Player

Kim Reisman

Donna Schlitt

Stephen Sparks

Gregory Stover

Jeff Switzer

Stephen Taylor

Phil Thrailkill

Steve Wood

**Staff**

**Executive**

**Director**

Patricia L. Miller

**Associate**

**Director**

Riley Case

**Secretary**

Heather Catlow

Dana Gonzales

**Bookkeeper**

Bonnie Petrow