

Monthly Update

April 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Do you remember hearing a “good news-bad news” joke? Well, this is one of those “good news-bad news” type letters. First – the “good news” that we want to share. As we approach Easter, I felt compelled to reprint a chapter from a book I had put together entitled *Spiritually Speaking*. It talks about the life of Jesus Christ and the significance of His resurrection from the dead. A lot of time we are caught up in the trappings of this holiday season and are involved in Easter egg hunts, the Easter Bunny, and even the events at the church with putting on a cantata. But I thought it would be good to look at the reality of Jesus and the importance of the resurrection to our Christian faith. Ours is one that is firmly grounded in the historical reality of the physical universe. Although it has been said, and rightly so, that Jesus does not need lawyers to “defend” Him – He needs witnesses, still this is reasoning has led many people to faith in Christ.

I have not only written this information, I have used it in a sermon, preaching and concluding with the observation that, “Even though this reasoning has led many people to faith in Christ, that is not how I came to know Him as my Lord and Savior.” I then go on to give my testimony that when I had been driven in desperation to my knees over my brother’s life-and-death issues with drugs and had nowhere else to turn, and in desperation prayed – he was delivered from his addictions. In heartfelt gratitude, I told Him that, “Since You ‘gave’ my brother back to me, I would live my life for You.” In that instant I felt a flush of heat all over my whole body and an unbelievable sense of peace. That was a life-changing experience – and I have never been the same since.

Now – the “bad news” part of our Update. We are dealing with the same issue that threatens to rip our denomination apart – that of homosexuality, and a problematic denominational leadership. This is also in the forefront of the secular news as we face severe challenges on all fronts from these determined people. But even here we can take comfort in the “good news” part of our Update. We know Whom we serve, Who is the rock of our strength, and for Whom we can count it a privilege to fight. We are called to “contend for the faith” – and shall continue to do so for as long as necessary.

Please continue to stand with us in this battle. Without you – and indeed – without your prayers and financial support, we would not be able to do what God has called us to. Please continue to partner with us as we continue in this war for the heart and soul of not only our United Methodist Church but also for our nation.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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April 2014 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion . . . Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.

It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. – John Adams

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The Good Stuff. Who is this Jesus?

During the Easter Season, it is always good to get back to the basics of our faith. This is extracted from a book I had put together entitled “Spiritually Speaking” (Chapter 3; footnotes are omitted). I offer it for your consideration. – AOM

What makes Christianity unique? What is the “logic” behind the existence of this faith? This is a question that needs to be examined. In other words, we need to know why we believe what we do. The questions we need to answer are, “Why do we think that we are so unique among the world’s religions? Why shouldn’t there be many paths to God? What makes us think that Christianity is so special?”

The Historical Jesus

Central to our faith as Christians are the person and works of Jesus Christ: He claimed to be no less than the Son of God – and our Savior. Central to his claim is possibly the single most important event in the history of the world: the resurrection. This single event has been called the linchpin of Christianity. So, for critics to claim that Christianity is just one of many religions, they must explain the empty tomb.

Some people tried to claim that Jesus never really existed on earth in human form. C. A. Bower was the last person to attempt to do this – in 1857. The “problem” is that there is just too much proof that he actually lived, walked, talked, and associated with people. There are over ten secular accounts that Christ walked the face of the earth. Let’s look at just three.

Flavius Josephus – a Jewish historian wrote, “Now there was about this time Jesus [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”¹ [*The Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3; p. 480]

As far as Josephus’ writings, Regis Nicoll makes the point in his article “All Evidence Beyond Reasonable Doubt” that, “There are several remarkable things about this passage. First, Josephus was a member of the community most offended by the Christian message. Second, there is no hint of criticism about the reports of Christ’s post-resurrection appearances; to the contrary, Josephus seems to give credence to the apostolic account. Third, Josephus’ indictment of his countrymen and his Roman rulers was sure to rile both groups, and stands as a testimony to his objectivity. And lastly, this first-century account runs counter to the historical revisionists who propose that Christ’s divinity was a concoction of a fourth-century theocracy.”¹

Cornelius Tacitus – a Roman historian wrote, “While Rome burned, Nero accused the Christians; ‘Christ’ who was founder of the sect, was put to death during the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition (i.e., Christianity) repressed for a time was not only in Judea, but broke out in Rome.”²

A third reference is found in a letter from Publius Lentulus, Governor of Judea, to the Roman Senate, that reads – in somewhat modernized language, “There has appeared in these times, and still is, a man of great power named Jesus Christ, who is called by the Gentiles the prophet of truth, whom his disciples call the Son of God; raising the dead and healing diseases, a man in stature middling tall, and comely, having a reverend countenance, which they that look upon may love and fear; having hair of the hue of an unripened hazel-nut and smooth almost down to his ears but from the ears in curling locks somewhat darker and more shining, waving over his

shoulders; having a parting at the middle of the head according to the fashion of the Nazareans; a brow smooth and very calm, with a face without a wrinkle or any blemish, which a moderate color makes beautiful. With the nose and mouth no fault can be found; having a full beard of the color of his hair, not long but a little forked at the chin; having an expression simple and mature, the eyes gray, glancing, and clear; in rebuke terrible, in admonition kind and lovable, cheerful yet keeping gravity; sometimes he has wept, but never laughed; in stature of body tall and straight, with hands and arms fair to look upon; in talk grave, reserved and modest so that he was rightly called a prophet....”³

So we know that Jesus physically existed in human form.

Indeed, there are many religions. We can even visit the tombs of some of their spiritual founders: Mohammed, Confucius, Buddha. As a matter of fact, when I was stationed in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, I had a chance to travel. During one of these trips I visited what is reputed to be the tomb of Buddha.

We can visit the tomb of Jesus, too, but there’s one difference: it’s empty! The Bible itself points out the importance of the resurrection, “...and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised; for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”⁴ [*The Bible*, Corinthians 15:14-19, NASB]

Even our enemies recognized this fact. Gulen Ahmed leader of the Amadia sect of the Muslim faith told his followers on his death bed, “In your war against Christianity, attack at the point of the Resurrection.”⁵

Apologetics

Now let’s look at what we know: We know that Jesus was a literal, historical man. We know that he was executed. And we know that three days later, the tomb was empty. So if a person is to successfully discredit the Christian faith, he must account for the missing body. There are four theories used to try to explain away the empty tomb.

The Pharisees Stole the Body

The first is that the Pharisees stole the body. The reasoning was that the Pharisees got together after they had succeeded in having Jesus crucified and talked about how his disciples had claimed that he would rise from the dead. To prevent them from stealing Jesus’ body and causing even more trouble, they would steal it first to forestall any such attempt by the disciples. The problem with this theory is that when Jesus’ followers started growing in number claiming that they had seen him risen from the dead, the Pharisees would have produced the body – and Christianity would have died right then. This theory is the weakest of the four and cannot be supported in the least.

The Disciples Stole the Body

The second theory is that the disciples stole the body. There are many problems associated with this. The first is the Roman seal; of itself, it would not have stopped anyone. But whoever dared to break a Roman seal would incur a death sentence that would be carried out with all of the persistence of the Roman Empire. Not many people were brave enough to take such a drastic, fatal step.

The second problem with this argument is the issue of fighting the Roman soldiers who had been stationed to guard the body of Jesus. At that time, the eleven disciples would have had to overcome the sixteen Roman guards, the most efficient fighting machine on earth at that time. The contention that the Roman guards might have gone to sleep enabling the disciples to steal the body is equally implausible. Given the high state of discipline and the camaraderie among these men; their knowing that the penalty was death if they should fail in their assigned duty; and the impossibility of the disciples’ being able to steal the body without waking the guards renders this idea insupportable.⁶

In addition, prior to the crucifixion the disciples were like scared rabbits; they had all fled when Jesus was taken captive on the Mount of Olives, and only one had dared to attend his crucifixion. After the resurrection there was a remarkable change; they suddenly became brave and fearlessly preached that Jesus had risen from the dead! History shows that ten out of eleven of the disciples went to their deaths claiming Jesus' resurrection. Tradition has it that "Doubting" Thomas was killed in Madras, India. John, the lone survivor, was reportedly boiled in oil and then exiled to Patmos.⁷ This last reason was one of the factors that led to the conversion of Chuck Colson. A student of human nature, Colson had reasoned that people don't die trying to uphold a lie; if a person's life is about to be taken for what he knows is false, he will admit to the truth. This aspect was supported by Dr. Lehman Strauss when he stated, "...we cannot imagine the disciples...going into all the world to preach a living Christ at the sacrifice of their own lives under such false pretenses."⁸

Dr. George Schweitzer, a chemistry professor, analyzed possible alternative explanations for the empty tomb. After affirming the resurrection, Dr. Schweitzer concluded that a miracle almost as great as the resurrection was the change in the disciples. Nothing less could account for their courage, vision, and sacrifice in proclaiming Christ.⁹

Finally, Colson drew from his own personal experience as special counsel to President Nixon and states that a hoax such as the disciples would have had to perpetrate would not hold. He personally saw how conspiracies fall apart under pressure and the truth would have leaked out despite the attempts by some of the most powerful men on earth during that era.¹⁰ He further elaborated, "Is it really likely that a deliberate cover-up, a plot to perpetrate a lie about the Resurrection, could have survived the violent persecution of the apostles, the scrutiny of early church councils, the horrendous purge of first-century believers? Take it from one who was inside the Watergate web looking out, who saw firsthand how vulnerable a cover-up is: Nothing less than a witness as awesome as the resurrected Christ could have caused these men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive."¹¹

On the Watergate conspiracy compared to the disciples' behavior, Nicoll further observed that, "Even for the impartial critic, nothing short of steadfast belief could explain how a band of cowards could be transformed into men of valor overnight. Despite the constant threat of torture, alienation, imprisonment, and death, the disciples held firm to their account of a resurrected Messiah. They surely had ample opportunity and motive for coming clean about the "cover-up," or at least, for reconsidering their testimony. Yet, although ten of the eleven original apostles were martyred for their faith, there is no evidence that any one of them ever recanted.

"The behavior of the disciples only makes sense once we accept that they actually believed that the incredible story they were telling was true."¹²

"In his book *Loving God*, Chuck Colson writes about his involvement in the Watergate conspiracy. Colson describes "hand-picked loyalists" who believed passionately in their leader, and who had sacrificed everything—lucrative personal careers, privacy, and family—for the sake of their leader and their noble cause.

Nicoll goes on to make the point that, "These were men who had the power and prestige of the highest office in the land. Men whose leader was victorious, having just won a landslide election. Men who, with a word, could mobilize the military, fire personnel, or order a private jet or limo. Men who had everything to lose from a failed cover-up. Yet with all that was at stake, Colson writes that this small inner circle 'could not hold a conspiracy together for more than two weeks.'¹³

"Unlike Christ's disciples, who faced beatings and execution, the Watergate conspirators faced at most, a prison term, embarrassment, and an end to the perks and clout of the White House. But within weeks after hints of the cover-up reached Judge Sirica, "the natural instinct for self-preservation was so overwhelming that the conspirators, one by one, deserted their leader, walked away from their cause, [and] turned their backs on the power, prestige, and privileges," writes Colson.

"In contrast, the disciples were powerless men whose unpopular leader had been defeated, and who quickly found themselves guilty by association. Yet these "marked men" boldly entered Jerusalem, the most hostile place on earth to deliver their thoroughly unwelcome message—a message that would have been readily contested by any number of persons, had the counter evidence existed.

“Both the Jewish leadership and the Roman authorities were not only highly motivated to quash any resurrection ruse, but had the political muscle and wherewithal to extract confessions and find the body, if indeed it existed. That no such evidence came forth is reflected in the late first century account by the Jewish historian, Josephus.”¹⁴

It can be seen that neither can this theory be supported.

The “Wrong Tomb”

The third attempt to explain away the missing body is called the “Wrong Tomb” theory. The reasoning was that everyone, in their grief and anguish, went to the wrong tomb. There! That explains it! The only problem is that if one is to support this idea, he would also have to believe that: Mary in her grief went to the wrong tomb; Peter & John in their hurry went to the wrong tomb; the Pharisees in their anger and fury also went to the wrong tomb; the sixteen Roman soldiers fainted in front of the wrong tomb; and Joseph of Arimathea owned a tomb and didn’t even know where it was! This would be laughable in the extreme. This theory cannot stand the test of serious reasoning.

The “Passover Plot”

The last and most sophisticated theory is known as the “Passover Plot.” This idea is that a resurrection hoax would be perpetrated by Jesus. Since he knew there would be a coming confrontation with the Jewish religious leaders, he would stage it so as to appear to rise from the dead. To do this, he worked out an elaborate plan. When he spoke the code words, “I thirst,” a sponge with drugs would be put to his lips, he would drink the mixture which would then put him into a death-like coma. In the coolness of the tomb, he would revive, push the stone aside and walk away so that His disciples would think that he had risen from the dead. This seems to be a pretty good explanation – until you examine the facts.

First, is that when the Roman soldier pierced his side, blood and water flowed out. When asked about this, a surgeon remarked that this was a clinical sign of death and explained that the blood separates from the clear watery-like liquid and accumulates in the chest cavity. So for Jesus to fake this, he would have had to know this – some 1900 years before this medical reality had been discovered. This is reinforced by the testimony presented in an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, “Clearly the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound on his side was inflicted. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.”¹⁵

The second problem with this explanation is the beating Jesus had received, the lashing of 39 stripes with a flagrum – a whip. Once I was talking with two men who were discussing a mutual friend of theirs who lived in the Middle East: he had gotten drunk and killed an Arab. Rather than being executed as was the law, he was given 39 lashes and sent back to the United States. I responded, “Man, he was really lucky!” One of the men looked at me and replied, “No, Allen, you don’t understand. That beating was so severe that it almost killed him!” I understood the truth of what they meant when I saw a picture of a man being whipped in an Islamic country. It made me sick.. Such a beating would have a devastating effect on any man receiving it.

So to describe how this theory would work out: In Jesus’ weakened condition, he would have had to get out of His burial wrapping by himself; push away a stone weighing over a quarter of a ton; overcome sixteen Roman guards, the most efficient fighting machine on earth at that time; and walk away so that no one had seen him. Not believable!

The Bible narrates the visit to the empty tomb on the third day after the crucifixion with the words “...saw and believed.”¹⁶ Dr. Thomas states that, “The construction in the Greek language makes it clear that early on the morning of the resurrection the grave clothes were still wrapped up like a cocoon, but with no body in them.”¹⁷

History is replete with countless First-century martyrs who died believing in the physical resurrection of Christ. For them to have paid the ultimate price, something would have had to persuade them that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead.

The Deaths of the Apostles

Do you know how the apostles themselves died?

1. Matthew: Suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.
2. Mark: Died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.
3. Luke: Was hanged in Greece as a result of his preaching to the lost.
4. John: Faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of oil during a wave of persecution in Rome, but miraculously delivered from death. He was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos, where he wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation. He was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He lived to be an old man – the only apostle to die peacefully.
5. Peter: He was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross. According to church tradition it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.
6. James the Just: The leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club. This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the Temptation.
7. James, the Great: Son of Zebedee, was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry. As a strong leader of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. Reportedly, the Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.
8. Bartholomew: Also known as Nathaniel, he was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed for Jesus in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia where he was flayed to death by a whip.
9. Andrew: Was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.
10. Thomas: Was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the sub-continent. (Another source says that he was witnessing to a crowd in Madras, India. One of the leaders put a knife to his throat and demanded that Thomas recant. When Thomas refused, his throat was cut and he died.)
11. Jude: Was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.
12. Matthias: The apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded.
13. Paul: Was tortured and then beheaded by Emperor Nero at Rome in A-D 67. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment, which allowed him to write his epistles to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire. These letters, which taught many of the foundational doctrines of Christianity, form a large portion of the New Testament.

Jesus Through the Years

For almost 2,000 years, people have attempted to explain away the resurrection in one of the ways cited above – but have failed.

We know of skeptics who have disbelieved the resurrection. One was Dr. Simon Greenleaf, a professor of law at Harvard in 1842, who was an atheist; he wrote a widely-used book on how to present evidence that cannot be refuted in a court of law. One day, a Christian student challenged him to apply the rules of evidence that he taught to the information that they (the students) had that Jesus rose from the dead. After his attempt, he wrote, "Evidence that such as we have that supports the fact that Jesus rose from the dead has never failed in a court of law." Dr. Greenleaf became an enthusiastic follower of Christ.

Two other atheists were fed up with Christianity and were going to get rid of it by proving two different points: Benjamin Gilbert West set out to prove that “Christ did not rise from the dead.” His friend Lloyd Littleton set out to prove that “Saul of Tarsus never converted to Christianity.” Two years later they met and discovered that each had failed to prove their original theses but rather confirmed them – and each had become a Christian.

Dr. Frank Morrison, was a British journalist and an atheist, who was determined to rid the world of what he called “the scourge of Christianity” once and for all. After aggressive research, he wrote a book called *Who Moved the Stone? – The book that refused to be written*; this was later published by Zondervan. Dr. Morrison himself became an enthusiastic follower of Christ.¹⁸

Irwin H. Linton, a lawyer who has argued cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, writes that the resurrection “is not only so established that the greatest lawyers have declared it to be the best proved fact of all history, but it is so supported that it is difficult to conceive of any method or line of proof that it lacks which would make [it] more certain.” Even for lawyers not inclined to accept the Christian message, Linton states they have been “unable to refute the irresistible force of the cumulative evidence upon which such faith rests.”

All conspiracy theories collapse under the weight of historical evidence, as acknowledged by authorities hostile to the Christian message. For instance, historian Michael Grant admits, “Their testimonies cannot prove them to have been right in supposing that Jesus had risen from the dead. However, these accounts do prove that certain people were utterly convinced that that is what he had done.” Duke professor E. P. Sanders, has stated, “That Jesus’ followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What the reality was that gave rise to the experiences, I do not know.”

Even for the impartial critic, nothing short of steadfast belief could explain how a band of cowards could be transformed into men of valor overnight in the face of torture, alienation, imprisonment, and death. The disciples held firm to their account of a resurrected Messiah. Although ten of the original 11 apostles were martyred for their faith, as was Paul, there is no evidence that any one of them ever recanted.¹⁹

Lee Strobel, himself an investigative reporter and former atheist, cites multiple extra-biblical references surrounding the crucifixion, two describing the unnatural darkness at the time of Jesus’ death. If this had really happened it would surely have been mentioned by others. One is a man named Thallus who wrote a history of the eastern Mediterranean in 52 A.D. Although his work has been lost, reference was made to it by Julius Africanus in 221 A.D.: “Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away the darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably it seems to me.”²⁰ Paul Maier referenced a Greek author who wrote, “This phenomenon, evidently, was visible in Rome, Athens, and other Mediterranean cities.” According to Tertullian...it was a “cosmic” or “world event.” Phlegon, a Greek author from Caria writing a chronology soon after 137 A.D., reported that in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad (i.e., 33 A.D.) there was “the greatest eclipse of the sun” and that “it became night in the sixth hour of the day [i.e., noon] so that stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea.”²¹

The weight of this information is in a testimony given by the late Sir Lionel Luckhoo, a man of extremely logical reasoning and reputed to be the world’s greatest lawyer. He states, “I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.”²² His reasoning is very similar to that of Dr. Greenleaf, the professor mentioned earlier.

There is no logical choice other than to face the reality that Jesus was crucified, died (was as dead as he could be), and on the third day, rose from the dead. This is a “logical” analysis that has led so many people to understand the truth of the Resurrection. The Bible reassures us on this when Paul the Apostle wrote, “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”²³ [*The Bible*, 1 Corinthians 15:20, NASB].

The best summation is given by C. S. Lewis, the brilliant Cambridge University professor and former atheist who was eventually won over by the evidence for Jesus Christ:²⁴

“I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

This is a logical analysis of the resurrection and it has brought many, logical, thinking people such as Lee Strobel to faith in Jesus Christ simply through the compelling proof of the Resurrection.

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One Solitary Life

Born in an obscure village, he was the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty years old, and then for three years he traveled around the country, stopping long enough to talk and to listen to people and to help where he could.

He never wrote a book. He never had a hit record. He never went to college. He never ran for public office. He never had a family or owned a home. He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

But when he was only 33 years old, the tide of public opinion turned against him, and his friends all rejected him.

When he was arrested, very few wanted anything to do with him. After the trial, he was executed by the state along with admitted thieves. Only because a generous friend offered his own cemetery plot was there any place to bury him.

This all happened over 19 centuries ago, and yet today he is the leading figure of the human race, and the ultimate example of love.

Now it is no exaggeration to say that all the armies that have ever marched, and all the navies that have ever set sail, all the rulers that have ever ruled, all the kings that have ever reigned on this earth; all put together have not affected the life of man on earth like this one solitary Life.²⁵ The man – Christ Jesus.

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Of Interest

+ ***Improving by Elimination.*** (The season of Lent, the six-week period of preparation for Holy Week, began with Ash Wednesday, March 5. This is a season for repentance, sacrifice, and self-denial.)

Film maker Walt Disney was ruthless in cutting anything that got in the way of a story's pacing. Ward Kimball, one of the animators for Snow White, recalls working 240 days on a 4 1/2 - minute sequence in which the dwarfs made soup for Snow White and almost destroyed the kitchen in the process. Disney thought the sequence was funny, but he decided the scene stopped the flow of the picture. So, out it went.

Often during Lent, Christians give up something as a form of sacrifice. For example, fasting or going without food for a period of time has a strong Christian tradition. Indeed, Jesus assumed that Christians would fast. He said, "When you fast..." (Matthew 6:16). But fasting can relate to more than just food. What habit or activity or custom could we give up in order to strengthen our Christian witness? Growing in Christ is not always a matter of adding something; sometimes we improve by eliminating something.

As the writer of Hebrews urged: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us..." (Hebrews 12:1).
– As published in the Confessing Movement newsletter, March 2014.

+ ***The Mission Society***. The board of directors of The Mission Society has elected the Rev. Max Wilkins as its president and CEO. Wilkins will take the helm June 1st. – As published in UMNewscope, January 22, 2014

+ ***Eddie Fox to Retire***

[Note: Through the years he has been a champion of our orthodox Wesleyan faith. – AOM]

The Rev. H. Eddie Fox, World Director of World Methodist Evangelism, has announced his retirement after serving for 25 years in that role, but he will remain until his successor is in place. Eddie may be the world's best known United Methodist. Eddie and his organization deserve much credit for the growth of the worldwide Wesleyan family. A job description for the position of world director is available by writing World Methodist Evangelism, P.O. Box 8388, Hermitage, TN 37076 or calling 615-885-5020. Recommendations and applications are now being accepted. – UMNS

(UM) Bishops

+ ***Methodist Bishop defends Marriage***. At least one United Methodist bishop is willing to publicly defend the biblical and United Methodist definition of marriage. When a liberal federal judge recently attempted to overthrow Oklahoma's law defining marriage as between a man and a woman, Bishop Robert Hayes joined Catholic and Baptist leaders of Oklahoma in decrying the ruling. Here is Bishop Hayes' statement: "As a leader in the religious community, I'm obligated-I'm mandated-to uphold what the Scriptures say. The Church finds itself in a precarious position. We are taught in Scripture that God created a man for a woman and we are bound to uphold and to share what the Scripture says to us. Society is ever-changing, ever-evolving but there are basic laws by God that do not change-they do not change with the wind." If you want to commend Bishop Hayes, his address is P.O. Box 60467, Oklahoma City, OK 73146-0467.

– As published in the Confessing Movement newsletter, March 2014.

+ ***Can We know God's Truth?*** In a recent blog, Bishop Grant Hagiya of the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area addressed the current controversy over homosexuality in the UMC. He wrote, "I cannot know God's Truth on this issue and can only stand on my limited conviction on what I believe." What a revealing statement! God's truth on this subject is stated repeatedly in Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. The key passages are: Genesis 19:4-11, Judges 19:22-25, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:24-27, I Corinthians 6:9, and I Timothy 1:10. At no point does Scripture even tolerate the practice of homosexuality, much less condone it.

– Bill Bouknight

+ ***Nullification on Display***. Frank Schaefer lost his ministerial credentials in Pennsylvania for performing a same-sex union, the Counsel for the Church in the Greater Northwest Area of the UMC concluded that two clergypersons that had performed same-sex unions would only be suspended for a 24-hour period. Sort of like "take a day off."

This is less than a "slap on the wrist." This is nullification. This means that the Book of Discipline has been ridiculed. Now all of the doctrines and discipline of the church are overshadowed by a huge question mark.

– As published in the Confessing Movement newsletter, March 2014

+ ***Methodist Bishop Drops Clergy Trials for Same-Sex Ceremonies***

Washington, DC--A retired United Methodist minister and past dean of Yale Divinity School will face no punishment for conducting a 2012 same-sex wedding in violation of the policies of the United Methodist Church. The Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Ogletree's refusal to commit to following church policies in the future led to a formal complaint filed against him within the denomination's conference for the New York City area. Ogletree and New York Bishop Martin McLee announced a settlement at a press conference today. Rather than Ogletree facing penalties, McLee will convene a public forum to give Ogletree further opportunity to promote his vision for the

church. When asked at the press conference if he would do another same-gender wedding, Ogletree replied, "Sure!" McLee further announced that he would cease all trials for New York-area UM clergy who perform same-sex rites. In the press conference, Rev. Scott Campbell, who served as Ogletree's counsel, essentially admitted that this constituted an open invitation for area clergy to perform same-sex rites.

The United Methodist Church has over 12.5 million members globally, 7.3 million in the U.S. and about 5 million in Africa, where the church is gaining about 200,000 annually while the U.S. church loses almost 100,000 annually. Liberal U.S. church activists, unable to win legislatively at the church's governing General Conference, have been waging a disobedience campaign against the church's marriage teaching. IRD's UM Action Director John Lomperis commented:

"No one today seriously argues that sex outside of man-woman marriage is consistent with the historic, core doctrinal standards United Methodist clergy vow at their ordinations to uphold. But a vocal minority now bizarrely brag about not keeping their word. By refusing to fulfill his basic responsibilities as bishop to uphold our standards, Bishop McLee is demonstrating a profound lack of integrity, breaking his own word to God and the church, and is further undermining trust in bishops throughout our denomination.

"Bishop McLee has effectively declared that he will run his conference as if it is independent from the rest of our global denomination.

"Bishop McLee has ensured a prolonging and an intensification of our denomination's internal conflicts. No wonder his region is losing members so rapidly.

"Despite their professed concern for church unity, this minority faction is determined to lead 'United' Methodists down the same liberalizing road that has split other oldline Protestant denominations."

– As published by UMAction; Director John Lomperis; March 10, 2014.

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Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream.

It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same. – Ronald Reagan