

Response to Dr. Ira Gallaway

We Confess, May/June 2002 Newsletter of The Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church, published the following article by Dr. Ira Gallaway. If you have followed the other negative responses to our Kairos CoMotion celebration you will not find much new here (other than a word play on "progressive" and "regressive"). As more of these articles come along, the interlocking media and directorates of the religious right within the United Methodist Church is made clearer and clearer.

Accusation

'Kairos CoMotion"
Regressive United Methodists at Madison
by Dr. Ira Gallaway

Some 300 United Methodists recently attended an event called Kairos CoMotion in Madison, Wisconsin. Those at the Conference chose to label their movement as Progressive Christians. This is an apparent public relations move to polish their image and suggest that they are moving forward in a positive way as they attempt to redirect the doctrine of The United Methodist Church. As a matter of fact, the members of this movement have never been liberals in a classical sense, but are instead radicals who are regressive in their theological commitments. They are embracing ancient Gnostic heresies of the first centuries of Christianity.

The stated objective of the Conference was to combat "a growing exclusiveness in The United Methodist Church". The primary thrust of the Conference, however, centered in on the Church's refusal to convey it's blessing upon homosexual activity. The call for inclusiveness demanded that the Church bless and affirm this practice that has been considered sinful and against the natural order of creation for the entire history of the Christian faith. Some of those at the Conference say that they will work within the system for change, while others plan to break the system.

The Conference was not progressive in any real sense, but regressive in the ultimate sense. Not only did the speakers advocate approval of homosexuality, the common thread of all who spoke was to deny the authenticity of the Creeds of Christianity and the authority of the Biblical witness. Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong dismissed any doctrine of Biblical authority "as a form of human idolatry". He referred to Jesus as merely "a first century Jewish experience of God". Indeed, personal experience was the only religious reality that Spong recognized.

Affirmation

[Note: Mismatched quote marks were in the original.]

The phrase "apparent public relations move" attempts to discount the self-identity of Kairos CoMotion. The term "progressive" best describes Kairos CoMotion in this time. In a previous time we would have chosen such descriptors as "social holiness" or "social gospel" or other prophetic orientations as would open the mercy of GOD to those seen as outside traditional religious boundaries.

We know Jesus Christ's opening GOD's loving presence to us and are energized to live out that opening in the midst of our time and place.

Inclusiveness does not "demand." Substitute "inclusive" for "love" in 1 Corinthians 13 to get a feel for this. Our readers can decide who is doing the demanding.

"Sexuality is God's good gift to all persons." [*Book of Discipline*] Any aspect of sexuality can be hurtful of self or other and be an expression of sin, but sexuality, it needs to be emphasized again and again, is God's good gift. We specifically reject any automatic equation of homosexuality with sin.

Appeals to "the ultimate" will always have others come up short. We yearn for the day we will hold before one another the measuring question of how to live in mercy in the current situation.

The authenticity of creeds and authority of scripture are measured against their ability to communicate a GOD experience (thus one creed follows after another and one translation after another). To hang on to any specific past its time of clarity into the experience of "a GOD not limited by language" is idolatry.

The Conference was strongly permeated by New Age "spirituality". One of the blessings used was a Chinook blessing which said, "We call upon the Earth, our planet home, with its beautiful depths and soaring heights, its vitality and abundance of life, and together we ask that it teach us, and show us the Way. We call upon the land which grows our food, the nourishing soil, the fertile fields, the abundant gardens and orchards, and ask that they teach us, and show us the Way."

United Methodist Bishop Sharon Rader quoted Jose Hobday, a New Age mystic, to the effect that everyone must "take a step into yourself" and "take a step into mystery", as the way of finding God. Apparently the Bishop preferred a form of "navel gazing" as the path to true faith rather than looking to Jesus Christ as the incarnate expression of the living God. Or, as the Chinook blessing indicates, the earth and the land show us the Way, rather than Jesus Christ being the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Retired United Methodist Bishop Judith Craig advocated setting aside the ancient Creeds and living a faith "appropriate to our time". Bishop Craig proclaimed, "We are saying of tradition and orthodoxy, *it is** the heresy." In other words, ancient Creeds and the Tradition of the Church are heretical. In the tip of her hat to the faith of the Church, Bishop Craig said, "I do believe that the work of Jesus is critical to the work of my life." The Bishop continued, "Now let's see what particular words have I left out? Salvation, propitiation, atonement, I'm working on those --- maybe someday. I did not talk about final authority." While the Bishop perhaps was trying to be cute -- or protect herself by saying that Jesus was important to her, she is hardly fulfilling her responsibility as a bishop "to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church." (*Book of Discipline*, ¶404.1) Bishop Craig nor Bishop Rader, nor any other bishop of the Church decides what is the doctrine or faith of The United Methodist Church. The faith is affirmed by the Articles of Religion and our Doctrinal Standards as adopted by The General Conference. These Articles and Standards place United Methodism in the center of the Apostolic faith and classical Christian tradition.

*Emphasis is by the author

If the leadership of the regressive Christians at Madison have their way, United Methodism will no longer be a Church but a sect, and outside the classical Christian faith. I am confident that a vast majority of United Methodists do not want that to happen. I (and they) will not be tolerant about such

Kairos CoMotion is "strongly permeated" by spirituality. We find GOD's Spirit breaking into the world through every vehicle imaginable (Samaritan, Gentile, New Age, Native Chinook, Roman Catholic, Pentacostal, United Methodist, and so much more). We rejoice in being able to experience Christ's presence in all and through all.

It would be helpful to read our [report](#) of Bishop Rader's comments. Franciscan Sister Hobday (the "New Age" label is a favorite discount by the religious right) was part of Bishop Rader's presentation. Sister Hobday helped build the main line of Bishop Rader's presentation: "As Christians we take up the Jesus walk. We live with people Jesus lives with. We challenge the systems Jesus challenges. We focus on the God in which Jesus found purpose and meaning."

The Chinook blessing, one of several, was in the program book, not Bishop Rader's sermon.

Proof-texting the Bible has a long heritage. The same goes for the *Book of Discipline*. Paragraph 404.1 also says: "Bishops are to be prophetic voices and courageous leaders in the cause of justice for all people." We affirm the bishops present among us not only guarding the best of our tradition but also building an even better heritage for future generations.

In the disagreement between the Confessing and Progressive movements it is important to note a consistent Biblical choice placed before us -
-sacrificing on the altar of creeds, or
-risk opening the church beyond tradition.

"I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." [Hosea 6:6, NRSV]

"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." [Matthew 9:13, NRSV]

"etc."

Dr. Gallaway's self-identified intolerance toward us feels as though it comes from some agenda beyond a Biblical witness and Wesleyan process of spiritual growth.

We strive for better - to go beyond simply saying, "Lord, Lord," and to be in partnership with GOD and neighbor. [ref. Matthew 7:21]

attempts to radically undermine the classical Biblical and Wesleyan faith.

It is a puzzle to me that the more orthodox bishops of our Church are allowing a few bishops, clearly outside United Methodist doctrine and discipline, make the headlines and essentially appear to be speaking for the Church. I have heard several bishops say that they would not allow such preaching in their conferences. But I raise the question, does a mythical unity of the Council of Bishops take precedence over their responsibility "to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church"? (*Book of Discipline*, ¶404.1)

Where are the defenders of the faith once delivered to the saints in The United Methodist Council of Bishops? Radical regressive bishops of our denomination have not hesitated to speak their mind and violate any call for unity of and by the Council. The Bishops of The United Methodist Church are more than the symbol of our unity. They are charged with teaching and conserving the faith. Let us pray that they will come forth with clear, positive leadership that will position the pronouncements of their radical colleagues for what they espouse - - regressive thinking, nothing new, but rehashed old heresies from by-gone centuries.

Kairos CoMotion is not a part of an Annual Conference nor was it funded by an Annual Conference. Kairos CoMotion is a grass-roots celebration of the expansive love of GOD and does not look to the dispensation or "allowance" of authority from a bishop to so celebrate.

We are, with GOD's help, "building faith, methods, thanksgiving, learning/teaching, and community of the church."

We pray we might better "regress" to such ancient heresies (that not heeded by the majority tradition) as those from Amos: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," [5:24] by Micah: "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God," [6:8b] and Jesus: "Blessed are you" [Matthew 5:1-11]

To so live we are constantly called to grow into a new heaven and a new earth, not to cling to old orthodoxies.