



The Watercourse

**FLUME - Florida United Methodist Evangelicals in the
Wesleyan Orthodox Tradition**

Christmas 2015

Merry Christmas!

From all of us on the FLUME Steering Committee, we wish and pray for a warm and loving Christmas season for all of you, your churches, families and loved ones. It has been a rough year all around on many different levels, but we can all rely on Jesus to get us through. Look forward to this new year with the grace, peace and love of our Lord Jesus in your hearts and minds!

Rob Renfroe Event at New Hope UMC Brandon

Many members of the FLUME Steering Committee joined with about 100 attendees to the Balancing Truth and Grace Event with Rev. Rob Renfroe, President of Good News, at New Hope (the old First UMC Brandon on November 22nd). Rob led us through his book, *The Trouble with the Truth*, before lunch, and then discussed legislative proposals for General Conference organization for the coming year. Everyone had a great time. Old friendships were renewed, and new ones made. We all came away inspired, with greater understanding to refresh our walks and discipleship in these troubled and confusing times. Thanks to Rob Renfroe for coming and for New Hope Brandon for hosting this great event!

A Review of The Trouble with the Truth: Balancing Truth and Grace

by Rod Groom

Rev. Rob Renfroe's book calls us to the full gospel treatment of balancing truth and grace. We all have preferences one way or another. Some of us prefer to tell the truth of the Gospel, no matter how bad that might make one feel. Some of us would rather err on the side of grace, even if that conflicts with the truth of the Gospel. As Rob tells us, we must balance these. Like God, we must have a heart of holiness as well as a heart of love. "Grace is essential and truth matters!"

For several decades, we have been fighting what some call "culture wars" in this country. We cannot agree on what is right and what isn't. Not only do we no longer agree on the truth, we cannot even agree on where to look for it. Both in the culture and in the church, some believe that "the truth is out there," that there really is objective truth, *real* truth, the way things actually are. Many others see the truth as a matter of opinion, that the truth is individual, subjective, whatever you want it to be. As a matter of act, many today are offended if you say there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus. Many of us were raised to believe there is one factual way of looking at the world, the scientific, fact-finding, logical, analytical, truth-seeking way. This is Modernism. Modernism opposed what Renfroe calls the Scriptural Worldview, where God determines and reveals to us what is real and what is not. Modernism excluded God from the equation, and tended towards atheism. Postmodernism came along and said since we cannot really prove what is objectively true, then it is a matter of personal preference, and that whatever you choose to believe is *a* truth and not necessarily *the* truth. This is the relativism of the



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Postmodern worldview. No matter what you believe in the area of morals, it is relative and subjective. Renfroe talks of speaking on separate occasions to a young postmodern atheist and to a young postmodern Christian about why Hitler was wrong for killing six million Jews. Neither one of them could agree with that. The Christian said he did not know what was in Hitler's heart. The atheist said everyone has a right to fight for what they believe, and while he would have fought against Hitler, he could not say he was wrong!

Renfroe does a very good job at explaining and differentiating these different ways of looking at the world. He explains that it boils down to a Scriptural versus a Cultural worldview, to objective versus subjective truth. Essentially, "Who determines reality— God or you? Does God determine who we are, or do we determine who God is?" (Kindle Locations 923-924). Renfroe goes on to discuss some of the "New Absolutes" in our postmodern culture, such as Openness, Tolerance, Pluralism, Being Nonjudgmental, and analyzes the many inconsistencies in each.

In his final, beautiful chapter, Rob reminds us all that love requires salt and light, truth and grace. We must tell the truth, but we must do it with love. *The Trouble with the Truth* is an important book to help us understand the many inconsistencies we find in our politically correct culture, and how we may begin to deal with them in truth and in love.

Jesus is...

by Mason Dorsey

(Joh 1:1-2 NAU) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God."

Stanley Kubrick, director of *Spartacus*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Shining*, and *Full Metal Jacket*, didn't see any particular source of light or life in the universe. Instead: "The very meaninglessness of life forces man to create his own meaning. ... The most terrifying fact about the universe is not that it's hostile but that it is indifferent. ... However vast the darkness, we must supply our own light."

And there are those who would agree with Kubrick. It seems that life has a meaningless quality to it. And the universe is indifferent. The universe is not a sentient being, so it cannot care. Look up at the stars at night and tell them your problems. The stars do not care. They aren't going to move for you to give you an answer. The planets don't align to give you good fortune the next day, they just line up because that's where they are in their respective orbits. The earth doesn't move for us or stop moving so as to protect us. That's okay, it was not created to.

Of course, where I disagree with Kubrick is that we have to supply our own light. I would suggest that the Light has been given to us, long before we were, the Light came to us.



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"In Him was life and the life was the light of men." Why does Jesus get to be the light of men?

Because He is (in the beginning with the Father). This is not in a sense like Jesus claimed the authority of being the light of the world, so He gets to be. It's not like your boss walking up to your desk and saying please get this done, because I need it now. And then of course, you're expected to get it done. It's called positional authority, your boss has the position and so has the authority.

That's not the way it is with Jesus. Jesus didn't get promoted to be the light of men. Jesus didn't win a "king of the cage" battle against all the other gods and so won the title, "Light of Men". He's not the light of men because of what He's done or because someone promoted Him to be so.

Jesus is the light of men, because Jesus is. John declared that in the beginning was the Word. If there's a beginning, then there has to be a time when something wasn't. But then how could Jesus be there in the beginning? Because there is no beginning of Jesus. There's no time when Jesus started, and previously Jesus did not exist. Jesus did not begin, Jesus is. For Jesus to have been there in the beginning, Jesus is.

The verb that always fits with Jesus is the present tense of the verb be, in the third person. No matter what point in time we are talking about, Jesus is. Before the beginning of all things, Jesus is. At the beginning of all things, Jesus is. In every point in history, Jesus is. Tomorrow, Jesus is. When the heavenly Jerusalem comes to earth, Jesus is. For all of eternity, Jesus is.

The only time we use the past tense to describe Jesus is when we talk about the 33 years He lived on earth and did something at a point in time, like He was born, talked, spoke, ate, healed, delivered, died. The only reason we use "will be" to talk about Jesus is to describe His coming back to intersect our time for the last time and permanently establish His Heavenly kingdom here, forever. But, if we're talking about Jesus from an existence perspective, we only say that Jesus is.

There was a time when you and I weren't, but not Jesus. Jesus is. There was a time when you and I did something, but not Jesus. Jesus is. There is this time now, when you and I are doing something. At this time right now, Jesus is. There is a time when you and I will do something, but not Jesus. Jesus is. That's the beauty of Jesus being eternal, Jesus always is. Because Jesus is eternal, you and I have a beginning. But that also means you and I have an ending. However, because Jesus is eternal, you and I have a resurrection to being a permanent "is" with Jesus.

It's Jesus who is, who took on our flesh and dwelt among us. This is why we have Advent to prepare us to receive Jesus. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate The Word who



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always is, coming to be the light of men. There is no other source of light for us, for the universe. It's only the Word who was in the beginning, who was with God, who is God.

Merry Christmas!!

God with Us

by Carolyn Welsh

Each month, my husband John and I do a church service at a nursing home in Stuart. A sweet little lady of 95 plays the piano, a tone-deaf lady of about 80 leads the singing, I read the Scripture and John gives the message. Christmas can be a very sad and lonely time for those in nursing facilities. When I read the editorial by Rob Renfroe in the November/December issue of Good News, I was inspired to give his message to these dear people. The title of his editorial is Rob's message is that God wants to be more than God above us, or God against us, or even God for us. It is in the heart of God to be God with us. "Why is there a Christmas?" he asks. Because God doesn't ever want us to be alone. The certainty of Rob's message is that God is with us and he will never forsake us. We are not alone. God is here now. If you haven't read the article, I highly recommend it. The message is simple and filled with TRUTH.

A Review of Seeing Black and White in a Gray World: The Need for Theological Reasoning in the Church's Debate Over Sexuality

by Rod Groom

Dr. Bill T. Arnold is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, and author of twelve books. Dr. Arnold is an elder in the United Methodist Church, and has been a delegate to two General Conferences.

He admits to having somewhat narrow research interests. However, on his way to the last General Conference in Tampa, he decided to read something a little more directly related to the questions facing our denomination. He chose Adam Hamilton's *Seeing Gray in A World of Black and White* (Nashville, Tn.: Abingdon Press 2008). He knows Hamilton and respects his great work as a pastoral leader in the United Methodist Church. He also knew that he and Hamilton disagreed on the issues of human sexuality facing the church.

He admires Hamilton's seeking a "third way" through many of the controversies confronting the church, but was surprised and disappointed "by the number of unsupported assumptions, errors of reasoning, and flawed arguments running throughout the book" (Kindle Locations 137-139). His goal in this book is not to just pick apart Hamilton's work, but to examine similar arguments



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made by others in the current debates. As Dr. Arnold's subtitle tells us, he is advocating for clear, theological reasoning in these issues. These controversies are not easy ones to resolve, and we must look at all the pros and cons in a clear fashion. The stakes are very high.

Dr. Arnold gives us much food for thought, and impressed me with concise and compassionate analysis throughout. So much so, that this book has become for me a practical handbook for reviewing many of the salient points about which many of us disagree today.

As a rough summary of *some* of his points: We sometimes seek to see gray that is really not there. The options given of either being a Jerry Falwell or a Bishop Spong are extreme and unhelpful, when so many other options are available. In some cases, options are being presented which are of different orders of things, and really not relevant except to manipulate the conclusion. The suggestion that we are approaching a fork in the road may not be true, a middle way may not be possible, and would not necessarily represent progress for the church. Arnold has much more to say, and his analyses show there are many unwarranted assumptions continually relied upon to swerve opinions that are not helpful in supporting or reforming the church, let alone in making disciples for Jesus Christ.

The one overriding observation Dr. Arnold makes that sticks with me very strongly is that the United Methodist Church in its history, doctrine, debates and in its *Book of Discipline* as presently constituted **IS "the third way" in most of the controversies.** We have already found the compromise as much as we possibly can in human sexuality, in our stances on abortion, as well, perhaps, in other areas. *I already knew this, but forgot.* As Arnold reminded me, if you have two points in opposition, and you find a middle road between the two of them, it doesn't mean the opposition will end. For example, in my thinking, if your position is represented by the number 0, and mine by the number 10, we can compromise on the middle ground of 5. You can then protest and argue and try to demonstrate that 5 is still unfair. So then we agree on a middle ground of 2.5. And then 1.25? 0.625? Perhaps 0.3125? Oh, the heck with it—just make it a 0 already! Okay. **Okay?** Sooner or later, we have to agree to disagree and be done with it. However, we cannot enshrine that in our official policy or we are throwing out the baby with the bath water. My opinion, anyway.

In the final analysis, we must return to theological reasoning. As Dr. Arnold says in his last chapter,

The church doesn't exist to find more gray, but rather to study and understand more profoundly the black-and-white truths of God's revelation... [It's not that there is] too much black and white, but not enough. What we really need is less gray, not more. (Kindle locations 1816-1817 and 1874-1875.)

Read this book. Every time you are confronted with a discussion or argument to change the Scripturally-based, time-honored, and clearly developed principles of our *Discipline*, think of Dr.



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Arnold, think theologically, and ask yourself if this will indeed help to spread the Good News and to win souls for Jesus.

Jesus—A Light the World Can't Put Out

by Chet Klinger

Luke records these prophetic words from Simeon to Mary in Chapter 2:34-35: "Behold, this Christ is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and a sign which will be spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon's prophecy foretells the opposition in the world the newborn Jesus will face, as many fall and rise because of His name and His presence in the world, particularly in Israel. It also tells of a prophecy to Mary that she will share in His suffering. Dr. Bill Bouknight wrote the article, "The Worldwide Offense of the Cross" in The Confessing Movement's July-Sept 2015 newsletter, *We Confess*. He tells about authorities in a southeast province of China giving Christian churches a two-month deadline to remove crosses from public display.

We often hear and read at this time of year of efforts from atheists, from advocates of political correctness and even from soft-hearted Christian folks that displaying nativity scenes in public, conducting Christmas pageants in schools, and wishing people, "Merry Christmas," are offensive to non-Christians. They argue we should therefore put these signs and symbols away from the view of the public and children in school. Bouknight referred to Paul's mentioning about the crucified Christ being a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23). He quoted a seminary professor who in 1993 declared, "We don't need to hear about somebody hanging on a cross, and blood dripping, and all that stuff." She received a standing ovation.

Bouknight offers some ideas why some modern Christians find messages about Christ and the cross offensive: first, it is too bloody for many peace-loving folks; second, atonement is a mystery too hard to explain; atonement is not the only path to salvation; some believers don't believe in hell, therefore all who die will be welcomed anyway by God in heaven, making the atoning cross unnecessary. I imagine that the light of truth Jesus casts upon the world is like turning on the lights in the kitchen during the middle of night. The varmints and vermin, if there are any, scurry quickly for the darkness. Wickedness favors the darkness. Christmas lights around the world annoy those who favor the darkness. This is why John Wesley, according to Bouknight, warned "Preaching of Christ crucified will be foolishness to the wise men of the world." Bouknight says all this pleases Satan, who thrives on distorting or disrupting the message of the atoning cross. Christians who believe in the truth should not be discouraged, advises Bouknight. The cross-centered message will not be popular or politically correct or culturally comfortable: "For the



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message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Bouknight says, “The cross will lose its offensiveness only when the Lamb of God returns in glory. Until then, the cross-centered gospel is the only message that can deliver forgiveness, new birth, salvation, and personal and social change. Therefore, LIFT HIGH THE CROSS!”

As for Christmas season, we can continue to lift high our Christmas lights and nativity scenes, and say, “Merry Christmas,” when the opportunity presents itself. Please pray that we will be able to maintain our freedom of religion and that it will not be restricted by governments, employers or social organizations. May Jesus return soon!