

We Confess

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WITHIN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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The Rise of Theological Liberalism and the Decline of American Methodism

BY JAMES V. HEIDINGER II

Reviewed by Riley Case

Jim Heidinger's book, *The Rise of Theological Liberalism and the Decline of American Methodism* has been around for about nine months now. It is a book which should inform the present discussions in the church about why United Methodism is declining, why the morale is low in many local United Methodist churches, why the church is in serious crisis and perhaps heading toward schism over matters relating to Scriptural authority and the practice of homosexuality. Unfortunately, the book is receiving far too little press. It is not being debated on the web pages as a book of this importance should be.

Many of us have found it to be true that many United Methodist progressives do not read books that present a perspective different from their own. There is (still) an appalling ignorance as to what evangelical faith is and its place in the history of the church. This is too bad. Progressives have a lot to learn from evangelicals. For starters, Methodism was a major player in the American understanding of the word evangelical. For years dictionaries defined the word "evangelical" as preaching based on the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of the atonement, as practiced by Methodists. In the period of camp meetings and revivals from 1784 to 1850 Methodism grew from representing 2.5% of American Christianity to 34%. By the end of the eighteenth century Methodism could claim 8% of America's population.

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(HEIDINGER, *Continued from page 1*)

Then something happened. A number of things happened actually. Methodism got respectable and mainline. It was a movement of the countryside and was not nearly as successful in claiming the cities. It became institutional and became suspicious of what was going on in churches that the institution was not controlling: Sunday schools, gospel hymnals, holiness associations, non-Methodist evangelists, independent mission boards, and non-Methodist schools for example.

All of this is related to the bigger problem, at least as understood by those raised in old-school Methodism: that was the erosion of Methodist vitality brought about by the questioning and sometimes denial of the theological essentials of the faith. In other words, there was capitulation to a severely compromised gospel which was the result of theological liberalism.

This is what Jim Heidinger's book is about. Heidinger, who was publisher and president of Good News for nearly thirty-five years, knows whereof he speaks. He has done his reading and his research. He knew or knows many of the major players. He speaks of "theological liberalism, an acculturated folk Protestantism, various blends of pop spirituality and New Age themes, and a postmodernism inclusivism that attributes validity to all of the world's major religions."

He traces this through compromised theologians, seminaries seeking academic respectability rather than service to the church, relaxing



of membership standards, obsession with the reinterpretation of the gospel to mean "social gospel," misguided ecumenism, and heavy-handed boards and agencies. Unfortunately, much of the conversation today about the ills of the church address institutional matters; they emphasize process rather than substance; they obsess with "unity" instead of faithfulness and integrity; they reduce serious theological differences to issues of politics; as a result the prescription for turning the church around ends up with something like "do better and try harder and let us love one another."

Unfortunately, it will take more than that. I urge persons to read the book. Obviously some will disagree with the analysis, but if so, may there be serious conversations about it. Church members should get a good education into issues facing the church today.

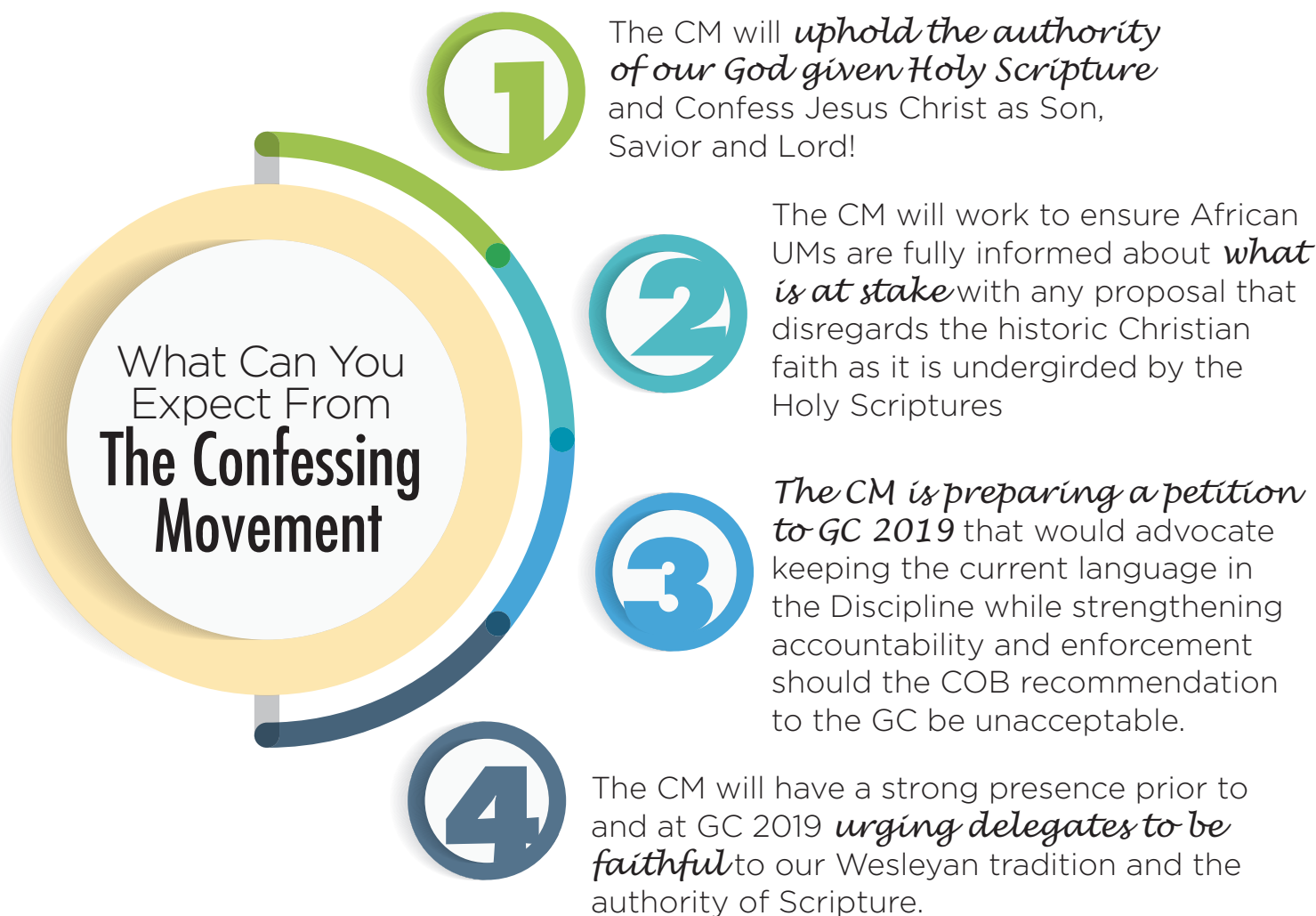
I urge persons to read the book. Obviously some will disagree with the analysis, but if so, may there be serious conversations about it. Church members should get a good education into issues facing the church today.

Dr. Heidinger's book is published by Seedbed and can be ordered online at <https://store.seedbed.com/>

The Commission On *A Way Forward*

The Commission on a Way Forward (Commission) met in late March for the 8th of their 9 meetings. Following that gathering their final recommendation was presented to the Council of Bishops (COB). The bishops will meet from April 29 to May 4, 2018 at which time they will approve a final recommendation for submission to the Secretary of the General Conference. They will share this recommendation with the Commission at their final meeting in mid – May. At that time the Commission and the COB will work together to discuss and plan for how the proposal will be presented to the church. The deadline for all petition submissions to the General Conference is July 8, 2018 allowing 230 days for delegate review prior to the opening of General Conference 2019 per the Discipline requirements.

It was recently reported that the COB plans to release their report the first week of July, giving no time for review by those who may want to file a plan or amendment. They will be required to make a submission without adequate knowledge of the bishops' recommendation. Confessing Movement Executive Director and Commission Member, Patricia Miller, thinks it is a mistake to keep the church in the dark for 2 months.



MAXIE DUNNAM'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

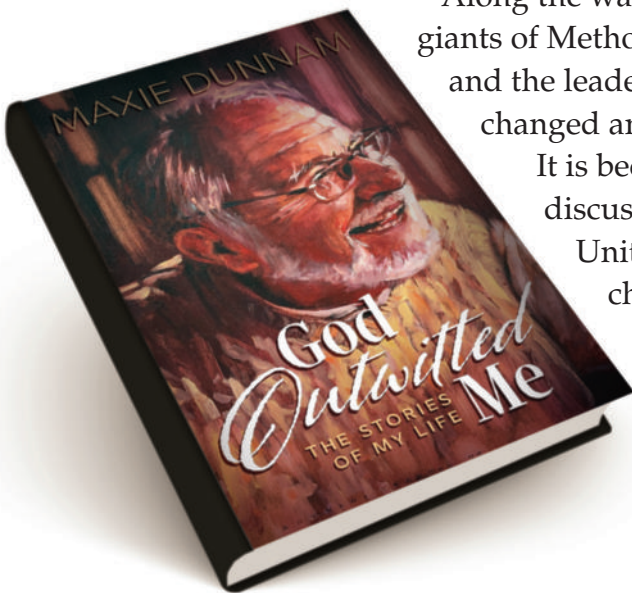
God Outwitted Me: The Stories of My Life.

Need some encouragement about The United Methodist Church? Then read Maxie Dunnam's autobiography: *God Outwitted Me: The Stories of My Life*. (Seedbed Publishing, Franklin, Tennessee). Maxie, Vice-President of The Confessing Movement board, has seen the church from all sides: a preacher at age 18; an organizer of the "group of 28" whose statement "Born of Conviction," a statement against segregation in 1962 Mississippi, resulted in 20 of the 28 (including Maxie) leaving Mississippi. Maxie was also a new church planter in California; head of prayer ministry at the Upper Room; founder of the Walk to Emmaus; an influential voice at a number of General Conferences; pastor of Christ Church Memphis; president of Asbury Seminary; and one of the founders of the Confessing Movement. Oh yes, he also wrote more than 40 books.

Along the way Maxie has met and been influenced by many of the giants of Methodism: E. Stanley Jones, many bishops, college presidents, and the leaders of the renewal groups. In return those lives have been changed and enriched by Maxie himself.

It is because of leaders like Maxie and the people and events discussed in this book that many of us are committed to The United Methodist Church. Despite the troubles facing the church we identify with its doctrines, its history and the great women and men of God who have nurtured us and so many others down through the years. Read the book and prepare to be blessed.

>>> Dr. Dunnam's book is published by Seedbed and can be ordered online at <https://store.seedbed.com/>



LEGISLATION DEADLINE

The Council of Bishops met February 25-28, 2018 to discuss proposals from the Commission on a Way Forward outlining legislation and the future vision for The United Methodist Church. Following this meeting, Bishop Jon Schol stated that "the final legislation for the February 2019 Special General Conference Session will be shared with the whole church in July of 2018." The deadline for the submission of legislation is July 8, 230 days prior the opening of the conference. This is required by the Discipline to allow delegates ample time to prepare.

CLARIFICATION

For a constitutional amendment to pass it would first have to pass the General Conference by a 2/3 majority. The amendment would then go to the Annual Conferences for a vote. It would need a 2/3 aggregate majority of ALL voting members across the Annual Conferences.

Some plans may need constitutional amendments

A Word From Our *Executive Director*

As you can imagine, rumors and misinformation abound regarding the work of the Commission on a Way Forward (Commission). Be assured that both The Confessing Movement and I remain committed to affirming the authority of Scripture and desire obedience by all United Methodists to the Book of Discipline. However, as a member of the Commission I am bound by a confidentiality agreement and, therefore, am unable to comment on actions taken by the Commission. The Commission reports only to the Council of Bishops (COB).

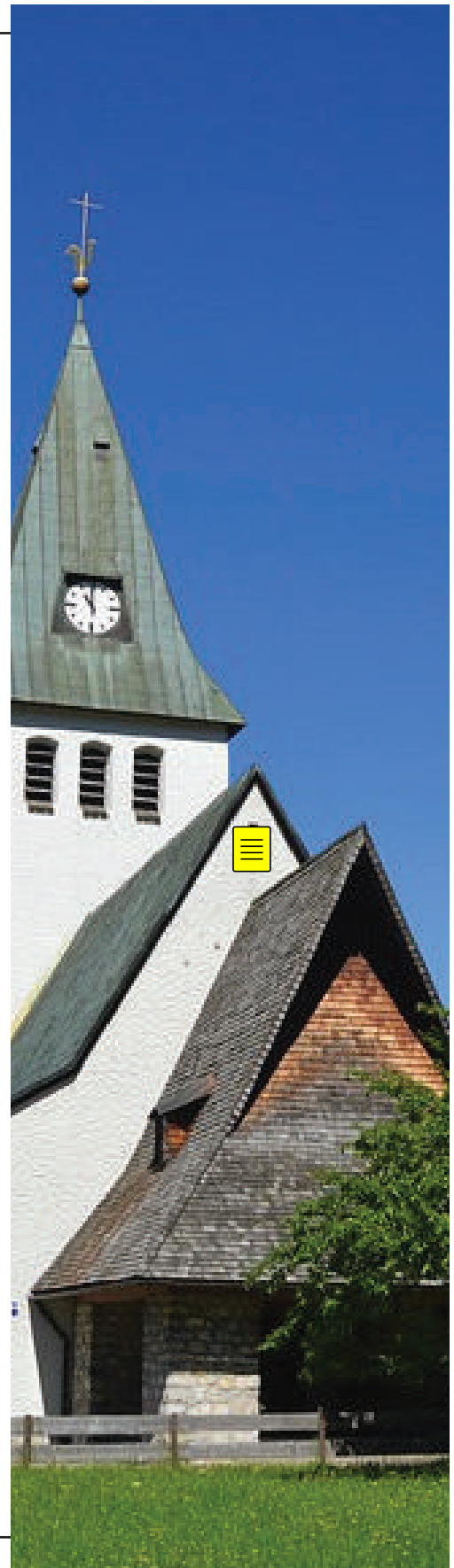
You should also know that decisions made by the Commission are not always unanimous nor do they necessarily represent the positions of each and every member. Further, at the time of this writing, the Commission has not made a final decision about what recommendation they will send to the bishops. However, once the COB has filed their recommendations with the General Conference or it is made available to the church, The Confessing Movement will respond appropriately. It is also important to note that there will be others filing plans on a way forward in addition to the COB. **Ultimately, the petitions will be considered by the General Conference, the ONLY body that can decide a way forward for the church; not the COB or the Commission.**

Please be assured we will continue to be faithful to the historic Christian faith as read in Holy Scripture, summarized in creeds and confessions, and articulated in the richness of our doctrinal heritage. Until GC 2019, I hope you will be patient and continue to pray for me, the Commission, the COB and the delegates to GC 2019.

In His Service,



Patricia L. Miller



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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.

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