**HAPPENINGS IN THE CHURCH**

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***GENERAL CONFERENCE: SAVING THE WORLD BY RESOLUTIONS***

I misplaced my United Methodist *Book of Resolutions (BR).* For the record I do consult it from time to time. When I was leading classes for new members I would present it along with the Doctrinal Standards, the General Rules, and the *Discipline*, as documents serious UMs should know about. One man asked to borrow my copy. When he brought it back he indicated he was no longer interested in church membership; furthermore, he would not be attending our church any more. No wonder a number of pastors I know would just as soon keep the existence of the BR a secret.

But back to the misplaced book. No problem, I thought. I will borrow one from another pastor, or a church library, or at least the district office. What I found out was that none of the pastors I knew, nor the churches I was acquainted with, nor the district office, nor a second district office, had a copy. One district secretary told me, “We used to order them but we never got any requests for them.”

Not everyone in the church, of course, is so disinterested. Church bureaucrats and social activists and seminary classes on social justice live by the book, the “book” being not the Bible but the *Book of* *Resolutions (BR)*. For some, United Methodism is not so much about doctrine and being saved and commitment to Jesus Christ, but about the environment and GMOs and new definitions of “rights” and new understandings of “equality” and “diversity” and how the Church recommends that government should be run. All of this can be found in the *Book of Resolutions*.

The BR is made up of resolutions and position papers prepared mostly by boards and agencies and approved by the General Conference. At most General Conferences other matters take up so much time that the resolutions are presented and passed without much debate, usually during the last hours of the last day of conference when persons are tired and want to go home. Indeed, it would be of interest to know whether any significant number of the delegates had even read the resolutions they approved. This is particularly true of overseas delegates because: 1) at this writing these resolutions for 2016 have not even been translated for the benefit of those delegates for whom English is not their first language: 2) the resolutions are almost entirely US centric dealing with matters overseas delegates know little about.

The United Methodist Church has not always had a BR. Before the 1968 merger of Methodists and Evangelical United Brethren, resolutions were printed in the *Discipline* and consisted of positions of the church on issues of interest to persons in local churches. These resolutions were typically short statements on matters such as the family and the evils of alcohol and working for world peace. With the Methodist-EUB merger in 1968 resolutions were taken to a new level. The structure of the new United Methodist denomination created superboards which were (are) basically independent fiefdoms which saw (see) themselves as leading the church to a brave new future, in part through the wisdom of resolutions prepared by the boards and approved by the General Conference. After 1968 the thinking seemed to be that the more resolutions the quicker the kingdom would come.

So, from a few pages in the *Discipline* before 1968the number of resolutions multiplied exponentialy. By 1980 the Book of Resolutions had grown to 218 pages. By 2004 the Book of Resolutions had grown to 954 pages and was 2 ¼” thick. This book consisted of 30 different resolutions on Native Americans; 8 on racism, and 11 on women. There were 2 resolutions on evangelism and 2 on the family. Among other things a resolution called for a United Methodist boycott of Taco Bell.

The 2012 *Book of Resolutions* carries over 300 resolutions with more resolutions piling up for Native Americans (now up to 39); there are 23 resolutions relating to African-Americans and another 6 related to Black Americans; the “social community” which addresses the rights and privileges that society needs to bestow upon persons or groups (as defined by boards and agencies) garners 30 resolutions. 48 resolutions relate to the environment and what we need to be doing about it.

What about resolutions having to do with winning the world for Jesus Christ? Despite the fact that making disciples of Jesus Christ is the mission statement of the church, only one resolution in the 2016 BR speaks of evangelism and that is in the statement on Holy Communion. If the church’s boards and agencies have any concern for the lost of the world it is not apparent from the BR.

The BR is one of the best examples of why ordinary United Methodists distrust church leadership. It is the story of bureaucrats operating as if persons in local churches do not matter. Church ‘stances” do not reflect the convictions of local church members but of the denomination’s progressive elite.

For example, what about one of the greatest concerns among Americans today, and for that matter, for persons the world over, namely, the threat of terrorism? There are no resolutions directly related to terrorism in the 2012 book. One petition, however, is concerned about repression in the name of “anti-terrorism.” By the same token there evidently are very few resolutions to be considered by the 2016 General Conference on terrorism, especially as it relates to Muslim extremists. Every mention of Muslims in the 2012 Book of Resolutions speaks about dialogue and understanding. If there is any concern about the tens of thousands of persons who die at the hands of Muslim terrorists it is not to be found in the BR.

This is not to say there are not a number of good resolutions in the *Book of Resolutions*. But it is to say that book is imbalanced, and even, in some instances, counterproductive and embarrassing. And so the BR advocates for socialized medicine and many other positions that would make Bernie Sanders proud. Some resolutions are so extreme even mainline progressives might be drawn up short. The BR continues to carry the resolution on “Puerto Rican Political Prisoners,” a reference to a group of terrorists some years ago who declared “war” on the United States in order to liberate Puerto Rico from colonialism and were convicted and jailed. (According to polls only 4% of Puerto Ricans favor independence.) The terrorists were re-branded “political prisoners” and their release became a cause for progressives. Eventually President Bill Clinton offered them clemency if they would promise not to engage in further acts of violence. One prisoner, Lopez Rivera, would not so promise and is still incarcerated. So for Lopez Rivera’s sake the BR continues to carry the resolution. Do United Methodists know resolutions like this are in the BR? What percent of Ums support this resolution? Would it be 1% or less than 1%?

In 2012 a major effort was made at General Conference to pass a resolution requiring the church to divest from certain companies doing business in Israel. The petition failed by something like 2 to 1. Never mind, progressive lobbyists have now convinced the Board of Pensions that the spirit of the resolutions on responsible investing warrants anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic action. So the Board of Pensions has withdrawn business from several Israeli banks.

Because of a resolution opposing Intelligent Design (p. 653) or any faith-based teaching in the area of science in public schools, the Commission General Conference has denied information space at the 2016 General Conference to a group that supports creationism. (I know of one church which has left the denomination over this resolution.) The resolution is so extreme that it places the UM Church on the side of atheists, forbidding all teaching in schools but evolution through natural selection. In one poll of Americans in general (which includes atheists and non-Christians) 70% do not agree with this decision. . Again, what percentage of UMs would support this extreme view? Would it be as many as 5%? To compound the problem the Commission on the General Conference is denying the space with the argument that is not consistent with the Social Principles of the Church. Do they not know the BR is not the same as the Social Principles? If groups are to be denied space in the Exhibition Hall because they are opposed to the teaching of the church the commission should start with the gay advocacy groups. And of course what do the overseas delegate think about being dragged into a US issue?

Is there any chance General Conference will act responsibly in regard to the BR? Don’t hold your breath. The BR which will be published after the 2016 General Conference promises to be even bigger and more complex and more extreme. The General Board of Church and Society has submitted 70 resolutions, either new resolutions or re-writes or amended resolutions. None speaks to the problem of terrorism. None say anything about evangelism. There are resolutions, however, on the evils of Israel including another effort for divestment from Caterpillar.

So the church limps along.