



Love Prevails

revolution 3-D: disclose(t), divest, disrupt

PROTOCOL DELAYS LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS AND DIGNITY

Not enough attention has been paid to the significance of the phrase: “[T]his Protocol is integrated with and integral to the whole and shall not be severable from the remainder of the Protocol.” This brief statement points to the political realities of The United Methodist Church and how they outweigh ethical and theological principles.

After noting: “The United Methodist Church is committed to recognizing, respecting and protecting the rights and personal dignity of every person, including people of all races, sexual orientations, genders, national origins, ages, and social classes”, these very rights and dignity are indefinitely deferred until “practical” matters of money, property, and separation are cared for.

While the Protocol lays out the minutest terms of time and dollars for separation and the garnering of votes, it does not remove the presenting issue of the false claim of LGBTQIA+ “incompatibility with Christian teaching.” In fact, it specifically delays such removal until a subsequent General Conference. This seems like an obvious setup for the traditionalists to receive their desired separation, while still being allowed to bedevil the remnant United Methodist Church. There are many traditionalists organizations (i.e., Good News, UM Action, the Institute on Religion and Democracy) who have amassed fortunes by crusading against LGBTQIA+ people and it would be folly to assume that they will suddenly cease and desist.

It is important to note that there will not be a clear separation by the time any post-Protocol General Conference of The United Methodist Church will be held. At the latest, one would expect a next General Conference to be held within a four-year period (by 2024). Any final separation will not be completed until December 31, 2024. Also, it is both misleading and disingenuous to assume that all the “sexual traditionalists” will leave The United Methodist Church. It is highly conceivable that there will be enough “traditional sexualists” (both nationally and internationally) remaining within The United Methodist Church to make it impossible, at worst, and difficult, at best, to rescind the “incompatibility” language and related legislation.

It is reasonable to assume that traditionalist organizations will continue to target individuals, congregations, and leaders within The United Methodist Church with “scriptural” reasons to disregard the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ persons. There is nothing to keep weasel-words such as “marriage, traditionally meaning between a man and a woman,” from the lexicon of United Methodists.

The Protocol leaves open the likelihood that traditionalists will continue to resist, whether up-close or from afar, The United Methodist Church’s future attempts to affirm, respect, integrate, and protect LGBTQIA+ people. The traditionalists agree to “bring no more claims for assets [financial/property]” but do not agree to refrain from interfering in the workings of The United Methodist Church through their extensive media platforms. The effect of the Protocol brings to mind a worst case scenario where the traditionalists extort millions of dollars, make off with valuable property, leave behind debt-ridden property, and delay removing the poison of “incompatibility.”

If this Protocol cared for the whole of what has brought us to a point of separation, it would have also been very clear that the language of “incompatibility” needed to be removed at the same time an agreement was reached which gives millions of dollars to the traditionalists. As it stands, the very seed of this separation, “incompatibility”, is very severable from the Protocol and will remain a seed of contention in The United Methodist Church.

The track record of the United Methodist Church regarding the rights and dignity of the marginalized is not a good one—indigenous people, people of color, women, LGBTQIA+, disabled persons, and more still wait not only to hear but experience a clear, winsome word, of how they are a valued image of an expansive and expanding Presence of Love.

Until Love Prevails.